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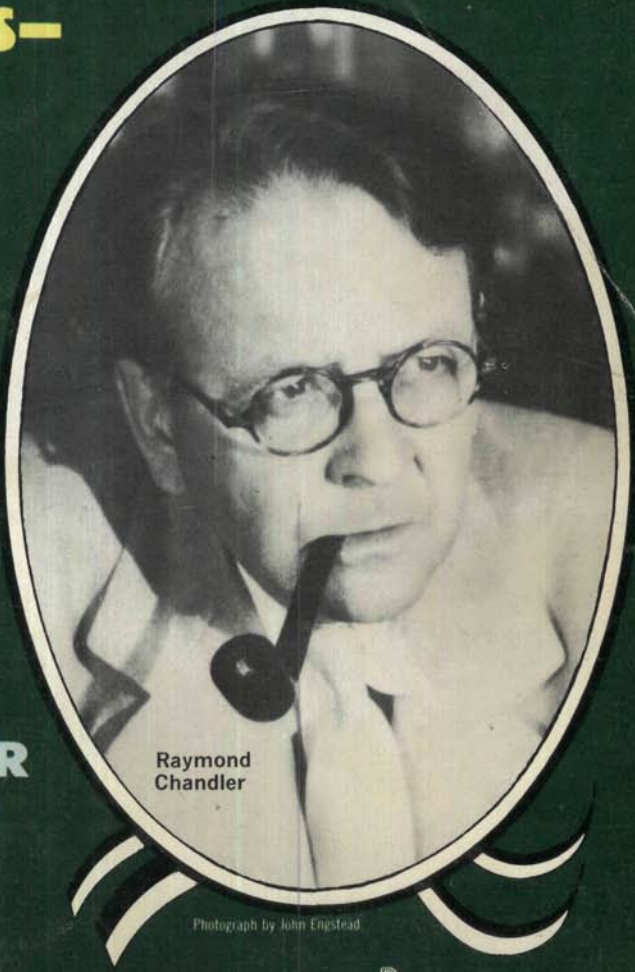

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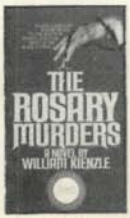

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Next Issue On Sale January 2 **ISSN: 0013-6328**

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PRESIDENT & PUBLISHER: *Joel Davis* EDITOR-IN-CHIEF: *Ellery Queen*

Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine, Vol. 77, No. 1, Whole No. 448, January 1, 1981. Published 13 times a year, every 28 days, by Davis Publications, Inc., at $1.35 a copy. Annual subscription $16.25 in U.S.A. and possessions; $18.50 elsewhere. Allow 6 to 8 weeks for change of address. Editorial and Executive Offices, 380 Lexington Ave., N.Y., N.Y. 10017. Subscription orders and mail regarding subscriptions should be sent to P.O. Box 2600, Greenwich, CT 06836. Controlled circulation postage paid at Dallas, PA. *© 1980 by Davis Publications, Inc., all rights reserved. Protection secured under the Universal Copyright Convention and the Pan American Copyright Convention. ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE ® is the registered trademark of Ellery Queen. Printed in U.S.A. Submission must be accompanied by stamped self-addressed envelope. The Publisher assumes no responsibility for unsolicited manuscripts.*

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a *NEW* Black Widowers story by

ISAAC ASIMOV

Shall we join the Black Widowers at their monthly banquet and take part in their squibbles and squabbles? . . . Yes, Henry, this seat will be fine. A small brandy? By all means—just the thing to top off the roast goose . . . Tonight's problem is pure puzzle—genuine, unadulterated, twenty-four-carat, blown-in-the-bottle puzzle, the real McAsimov, and clever as all get-out . . .

THE GILBERT AND SULLIVAN MYSTERY

by ISAAC ASIMOV

"Sir Rupert Murgatroyd," caroled Geoffrey Avalon, "his leisure and his RICHes, he ruthlessly employed in persecuting WITCHes—" He was returning from the cloakroom and was clearly in a happy mood. His dark eyes twinkled and his formidable eyebrows twitched in friendly fashion.

Except that "caroled" is perhaps not the right word to use in connection with any attempt Avalon ever made in the direction of song. It was not that he was either flat or sharp, for on no occasion in the memory of any member of the Black Widowers had he ever struck a note close enough to the desired one to be either flat or sharp.

Thomas Trumbull turned on his heel as though he had been jabbed in some tender portion of his anatomy with a thumbtack. He said, "Jeff, shut *up*. Five years ago, when you last did this, I told you that any repetition of this vile noise you make, will induce homicidal mania in everyone and that I fully intended to beat them all to the punch."

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"Come on, Tom," said Mario Gonzalo complacently, "the man is just in a Gilbert and Sullivan mood. Let's put him to some interesting use. If he doesn't do the words but just hums, we can all try to guess the tune."

"Except," said James Drake thoughtfully, "that it would be a lost cause. If Jeff hummed *Yankee Doodle* and then *Old Man River*, we couldn't tell them apart."

Roger Halsted said, "I don't think the experiment should be tried without earplugs."

Avalon would have drawn himself up had not his natural stance placed him in a perpetual 74-inch up-drawn position. His voice, in its natural rich baritone—when he was speaking—was distinctly aggrieved in tone as he said, "I had not intended to continue singing after I had emerged from the cloakroom, and I will cheerfully stop. But might I remind you that as tonight's banquet host I am within my rights in declaring myself permitted to sing?"

"To do something," said Trumbull gratingly, "that someone, somewhere, at some time, in a state not too close to drunken insensibility can call singing, yes. That does not, however, include what *you* do."

Henry, that best of waiters, who had listened blandly as he completed the table setting, raised his voice, without somehow seeming to, and said, "Gentlemen, please seat yourselves."

They did, and Emmanuel Rubin, who had been talking to Avalon's guest of the evening during the altercation, now drew the guest into the seat next to his.

Henry held the seat for the guest and said, "Welcome to the Black Widowers, Mr. Graff."

The guest looked up in surprise. "Do you know me?"

He was rather short, not much taller than Rubin, plump, round-faced, with a generous mustache like that of a baby walrus, and thick graying hair that covered most of his ears.

Henry said, "I attended a lecture of yours at New York University about a year ago and enjoyed it very much."

Graff beamed. He said to Rubin, "See, who needs intellectuals? With waiters, I'm big."

Rubin said, "Don't dismiss Henry that easily, Graff. We intellectuals bask in his reflected glory."

Graff said, "Listen, do you guys talk like this all the time? I never heard such fighting. Over every little thing, too. With words. With whole sentences. —And call me Herb."

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Rubin said, "You have to understand, Herb, that each of us spends most of his time with ordinary people. We can't pick on them; it wouldn't be fair. Once a month we're here and we can let loose."

"But you sound as though you're getting mad at each other. Look at Jeff Avalon. In one minute he'll take his knife and carve up everyone here."

"Not at all," said Rubin. "I give him five minutes and he'll be pontificating. Listen—"

Rubin waited five minutes and then, as the roast goose was placed before him, he said, "Of course, Jeff, it is really unjust to say Gilbert and Sullivan. It should be Sullivan and Gilbert. In any of the numerous parodies of the operettas, Gilbert's words are invariably changed but no one would dream of changing a note of Sullivan's music."

Jeff said, "You are quite wrong, Manny. There were other light-opera composers in Sullivan's time and after—Offenbach, Strauss, Lehar, Romberg, and so on. Many tunes of each one of these still live. But only in the case of Sullivan are any of the tunes ever sung by ordinary people. No one knows the words—except in the case of Sullivan—because only Sullivan had the greatest lyricist in the English language working with him."

His ill-temper seemed to have evaporated. "Gilbert is the one lyricist who used the full strength of the English language and the full vocabulary. He rhymes executioner with ablutioner, diminutioner, and *you*-shun-her. He—"

Rubin turned to Graff and said in a low voice, "See?"

Henry was making the rounds with the brandy bottle, and Avalon bestirred himself. Rattling his spoon on the water glass, he said, "Gentlemen, we come now to the important portion of the evening. Manny, since you were the one person who, earlier in the evening, refrained from needless pseudo-wit at my expense, and showed an odd and unaccustomed gentlemanliness of behavior—"

"Odd and unaccustomed?" said Rubin indignantly, his sparse beard quivering. "If you're intending that as a compliment, it's a hell of an ungracious way of putting it."

"Odd and unaccustomed is what I said," Avalon said loftily. "And I am asking you to be in charge of the grilling."

"What grilling?" said Graff, looking startled.

"The question-and-answer period, Herb," said Avalon, in what was for him a low voice. "I told you."

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Graff, recollecting, nodded his head.

Rubin intoned, "May I ask you, Herb, just how you justify your existence?"

Graff sat back in his seat and stared in astonishment at Rubin before answering. "Justify my existence?" he said, with a strong upward inflection. "Listen, you step out into the street and take a look at the cockamamie people passing by. You ever get into an elevator and listen to them talking? Three things you hear, three. 'What did you watch on television last night?' and 'Where are you going to go on vacation?' and 'You think the Mets will win today?' —That is, if they can talk at all. I should justify *my* existence? Let them all justify *their* existence, and then I'll justify mine. Not before."

Rubin nodded his head. "There's something in what you say."

Trumbull interrupted.

"You know, Jeff's right about you, Manny. Are you sure you're Emmanuel Rubin, or are you a lookalike sent here to drive us mad with unaccustomed sweetness?"

Rubin said, "I received word of a very nice paperback sale yesterday, so I'm in a good mood, but don't presume on it. For instance, I'll just say politely *once* not to return to that subject. —Now, Herb, putting the question of your existence's justification aside, what do you do?"

Graff said, "I'm a movie mavin."

"A what?" muttered Gonzalo.

"Mavin," said Rubin, "is Yiddish for 'expert'."

"You mean you make movies?" said Gonzalo.

"Not actually," said Graff. "I talk about them. I have, or I can get, almost any old movie that's been made and I show them, or I show clips, and I lecture on them. People like it. I give lecture tours, especially on college campuses, and I make a living. —Henry, tell these guys about my lectures."

Henry's unlined sixtyish face creased briefly into a gentle smile. "It was indeed an entertaining evening. I believe the audience, generally, enjoyed themselves."

Graff said, "There you are, an unpaid testimonial. But just the same, I might actually be making a movie, or helping make one, if I can only figure out how to handle the crazies."

"What kind of movie?" asked Rubin.

"Gilbert and Sullivan, actually," said Graff, with what seemed a trace of embarrassment. "I've been talking to Jeff Avalon about it

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on the way here and that's what put him into—you should excuse the expression—a singing mood."

"Is there money in Gilbert and Sullivan in the movies?" asked Drake skeptically. "I should think it has just a small cult following."

Graff said, "Bigger than you think, but you're right. You can't make a colossal extravaganza out of it. But then you don't have to spend ten million dollars on it. You can do it on a small scale. It's been done. Kenny Baker sang Nanki-Poo in a movie version of *The Mikado* and was cut to ribbons by all the D'Oyly Carte types that supported him. The trouble is, you can't do much with Gilbert and Sullivan except photograph the stage play. You can't change the music or the words or the plot because as soon as you change anything it's not Gilbert and Sullivan and you're nowhere. So if you're just going to photograph the play, you're not taking advantage of the power of the camera, and where are you?"

"Where indeed?" said Drake.

Graff said, "But these guys—I didn't tell you about these guys yet, did I? Two kids in their early twenties, but young as they are, they've really got it. You know, in any field of art, it's the young people who look at things with new eyes. These guys are a pair of crazies, of course, but you've got to expect that. Their names are Sam Appelbaum and Tim Mentz and they're pupils of mine. I give an evening course on movie-making and that's how I met them. They want to do *The Pirates of Penzance*, one of the Gilbert and Sullivan operettas, because they'd seen a performance by the Village Light Opera Group and were enthusiastic.

"They joined the Gilbert and Sullivan Society, which seems to be a very active group here in New York, and they met Jeff Avalon who's a Gilbert and Sullivan aficionado. —Is that the way you pronounce the word?"

"Quite," said Avalon. "Though my singing voice may not be approved by all, I presume that not even the most captious will try to prevent me from listening to music and I know virtually all of Gilbert and Sullivan by heart."

Trumbull growled, "You may know Gilbert's words by heart, but if you know a single note of Sullivan's music—or anyone's—may I be struck by lightning right now."

"In any case," said Graff, "I met Jeff through Appelbaum and Mentz, and a couple of months ago we were talking about what strategy to use in making a movie of *Pirates*, and how limited we were in handling it, and Avalon suggested an animated cartoon.

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Appelbaum and Mentz fell over themselves to grab the idea. You have the voices, the words, the notes, and you have a free hand to be as fantastic as you want. Gilbert and Sullivan operettas are always overacted anyway, on principle. I'm certain that if Gilbert and Sullivan had worked in the 1970s instead of the 1870s, they would have written the operettas for animation in the first place."

James Drake stubbed out his cigarette with a violent motion and said, "I think that's disgusting. You'll have a whole bunch of cutesie choruses dancing around Prince Charming Frederic and Snow White Mabel."

"No!" said Graff earnestly. "What do you think? Disney is all there is? Besides, who can spend the money on the kind of animation Disney used in the days of slave labor when you made a thousand different drawings to show Dopey rubbing his nose. We're counting on surrealism. In fact, these guys are going to use the techniques of modern art to evoke humor and fantasy in a whole new way. I can't explain how it will work. After all, am I an artist? But when they're through, it will work and you'll see how it works. It will start a whole new fashion and, on top of that, it will make them trillionaires and it would make me a few shiny pennies, too. *If* they do it, that is."

"Why *if*?" said Halsted.

"Because they had a fight, that's why. And they're still fighting," said Graff. "And go try and settle it. They've got all the money in the world waiting to be scooped in and neither one will move unless the other gives in."

"What are they fighting about?" asked Rubin. "Are they both in love with the same soprano?"

Graff shook his head. "You don't know the crazies of this world, do you? Crazies don't fight over a woman or over anything sensible. That's for plain people like you and me. Crazies fight over things you can't imagine—like when the action of the play takes place. Appelbaum says it begins on March 1, 1877, and Mentz says March 1, 1873, and neither one will give in.

"You see, you guys in the Black Widowers argue, but you forget, because you've got a million things to argue about, so you drop each particular argument in favor of another. I've been listening to you do it all through dinner. My two guys are big talents but they're limited. They've only got one thing to fight over, so there's no chance of their forgetting. With them its 1873, 1877, 1873, 1877, till you can get sick and die."

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"I take it," said Halsted, "that Gilbert gives no indication which it is."

"None," said Graff.

Trumbull said, with clear contempt, "Does it make any difference?"

Graff said, "Actually it does. The guys want to keep up a running set of montages dating back to Victorian times to keep pace with the words and music. These would be accompaniments and references to whatever was happening, sometimes so fast you couldn't really make out the details, but you would get it, uh, subliminally. —Is that how you say it? It would be a kind of running visual gag, and it could start a cult. You know, people would say, did you see that picture of Disraeli, and who was the other guy with him and what was he doing, and they'd go several times just to try to pick up all the clues. Well, there are places where what you show would depend on whether it was 1873 or 1877."

Trumbull said, "Then let them pick one of the two years and get going. Who would care?"

Graff said, "*They* would care. It's life and death with them. Look, do you know the play?"

"I don't," said Trumbull.

Drake said, "I suppose Jeff knows it by heart, but I just know the Major-General's patter song, which is an example of what Jeff was talking about with its fancy vocabulary and ingenious rhymes." Rather surprisingly, he lifted his hoarse voice in song, and with a fair approximation of the notes, went, *"Then I can hum a fugue of which I've heard the music's din afore, and whistle all the airs from that infernal nonsense, Pinafore.* —Which shows," he added, "that Gilbert could make a little fun of himself too, since *Pinafore* was his big early success."

Graff said hastily, "Well, let me just outline the plot quickly, so you can see where the trouble is. Is that all right?"

"Go ahead, Herb," said Avalon. "I'm host and what I say goes—or should go," and he bent his formidable frown on Trumbull, who shrugged and muttered something under his breath.

Graff said, "Frederic is a pirate apprentice. It was all a mistake because his nursery maid, Ruth, had been told to apprentice him to a pilot, but had misheard the word. Unable to return home and explain the mistake, she too joined the pirate band.

"As the play opens, Frederic has just turned 21 and entered his twenty-second year, so his apprenticeship is over. As the slave of

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duty he has remained with the pirates, but now that he has served his term, he will abandon them, and because he is also the soul of honor he will devote himself to their extermination.

"Ruth, a maiden of 47, wants to go with him for she loves Frederic. But then they encounter the daughters of Major-General Stanley, and Frederic, realizing that Ruth is old and plain, falls in love with Mabel, the prettiest of the daughters.

"The pirates surprise them and make ready to marry all the daughters—anything but marriage being inconceivable to good old Gilbert—when their father arrives and sings the Major-General's song that Jim Drake mentioned. The Major-General persuades the pirates to give up their scheme for marrying his daughters by claiming, falsely, to be an orphan boy. The tender-hearted pirates burst into tears and the first act ends happily.

"In the second act Frederic prepares to lead the police against the pirates. Before he can leave with his band, however, the Pirate King, together with Ruth, come upon him alone and tell him they have just remembered that he was born on Leap Day, February 29. The apprenticeship papers say he must serve till his twenty-first *birthday* and, strictly speaking, he has had only five.

"Frederic, the slave of duty, at once rejoins the band and as a loyal pirate, now tells them of the Major-General's lie. The furious pirates attack the Major-General's estate and in a battle with the police, emerge the winners.

"However, the police produce a Union Jack and demand the pirates yield in Queen Victoria's name. The pirates promptly do so, saying, 'with all our faults, we love our Queen.' As the pirates are about to be led away to jail, Ruth quickly explains that all the pirates are just noblemen gone wrong. The Major-General at once frees them saying, 'with all our faults, we love our House of Peers,' and everything ends happily."

Graff beamed around the table and said, "It's actually a very funny and happy play. There's just one line that creates the problem. When Frederic finds out his apprenticeship goes by birthdays and not by years, he explains to Mabel, 'In 1940 I of age shall be.' That means that on February 29, 1940, he'll celebrate his twenty-first birthday."

Drake nodded. He had lit a cigarette and he blinked his eyes slowly. "On February 29, 1940, *The New York Times* ran an editorial on Frederic's being out of his indentures. I remember reading it."

Graff said, "All right, but if there's a leap day every four years—"

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Roger Halsted interrupted. "But there isn't—"

Graff shook his head violently. "Just wait a minute. If there's a leap day every four years, then Frederic was 84 years old on his twenty-first birthday, and he was born in 1856. He was 21 years old in 1877, a year after his fifth birthday. He would have had to celebrate his coming of age on March 1, 1877, since there is no February 29 in that year and, Appelbaum says, that is therefore the day on which the action of the play opens."

"But—" said Halstead.

"But," said Graff, raising his voice, "the year 1900 wasn't a leap year. There was no February 29, 1900. Leap years are every four years except in centenary years not divisible by 400, as in 1900. That's what you wanted to say, isn't it, Roger? I think some Pope arranged it."

Halstead said, "Pope Gregory XIII in—"

"That part doesn't matter," said Graff impatiently. "The point is that one leap day is missing, so to get twenty-one of them, you have to move four years further back. Frederic would have to have been born in 1852 and become 21 in 1873, so that the action of the play opens on March 1, 1873. That's what Mentz says.

"*The Pirates of Penzance* opened in early 1880, so 1877 is the logical year, says Appelbaum, and Gilbert either forgot or didn't know that 1900 was not a leap year. Mentz says it's inconceivable that Gilbert would make a mistake about 1900 and that no true aficionado would think so for a minute, so the year was 1873. There they stand. Neither one will give in."

There was a silence around the table. Finally Gonzalo said, "You really think there's a lot of money in the picture if they make it?"

Graff said, "Who can tell about public taste—but there's a good chance."

"Then can't you make up some argument that would convince them one year or the other was right? You know, something that sounds good?"

"Like what?" said Graff.

"The trouble is," said Avalon sententiously, "that the world of Gilbert and Sullivan is not a real one and it doesn't lend itself to logical arguments. For instance, though it is clearly stated that Frederic has just turned 21 and that his birthday is on February 29, nevertheless the Major-General's daughters, when they first arrive on the scene, decide to take off their shoes and socks and paddle their feet in the sea. The scene is set in Cornwall, where the

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town of Penzance is located, and you can imagine what it would be like paddling in the English Channel in winter."

"Well," said Graff, "the daughters call themselves 'hardy little lasses' in their first chorus."

Gonzalo said, "Did the Major-General have any sons?"

"No," said Graff, "just daughters. In a full performance there could be as many as 24 daughters, all pretty much the same age and no sign of any mother, either. It *is* unreal, so how are we going to find some way of deciding between 1873 and 1877?"

Trumbull said, "You have to think of something that *sounds* good. It doesn't have to *be* good, or sensible. Look, wasn't Queen Victoria Empress of India, too? —Henry, would you be so kind as to go over to the reference shelf and look up Queen Victoria in the encyclopedia. Maybe it will say when she became Empress."

After some moments Henry said, "The title was secured for her by Benjamin Disraeli in 1876, sir, and she was proclaimed Empress of India on January 1, 1877."

"Ah, perfect. The whole thing is solved and we can forget about this nonsense."

Graff looked doubtful. "How is it solved?"

"Easy. Victoria loved the new title. Anyone wanting to please her would go around calling her 'Queen-Empress.' You quoted the pirates as saying that, with all their faults, they love their Queen. Well, if the action opens on March 1, 1877, only two months after Victoria gained the Imperial title, surely they would refer to her, with pride, as Queen-Empress. The fact that they didn't proves it was 1873."

Graff looked even more doubtful. "Queen-Empress wouldn't rhyme or scan."

"Don't be an idiot," said Trumbull. "I told you the argument doesn't have to make *sense*. It just has to *sound* good. It's just a piece of gobbledygook designed to settle the matter."

"I don't think that would win over Appelbaum," said Graff.

"Well, then," said Avalon, "let's think up more arguments like that, but let's keep them all on one particular year, because if we think up ways of arguing for both years, that won't settle matters. What else is there we can use for 1873? It doesn't have to be sensible."

"Anything else about kings and queens?" asked Gonzalo. "Does the Pirate King represent anyone?"

"I don't know that he does," said Avalon, shaking his head slowly,

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"but there is some mention of kings in the Pirate King's opening solo. He admits he sinks more ships than a well-bred monarch ought to, but then he says, 'many a king on a first-class throne, if he wants to call his crown his own, must manage somehow to get through more dirty work than ever I do.' Now can he be referring to some particular king?"

Rubin stared up through narrowed eyes. "Let's see— Who were on the first-class thrones in the 1870s? There was William I of Germany. The German Empire had just been established and there was a lot of chicanery there."

Drake said, "That was the chicanery of Otto von Bismarck, Manny. William I was just an old man who did what he was told."

Rubin said, "You're right there, Jim. —Francis Joseph of Austria was a dim sort of monarch and Alexander II of Russia was not bad for a tsar. Those were the only ones whom Gilbert would have considered as sitting on a first-class throne."

Halsted said, "How about Napoleon III of France? Wasn't he ruling about that time?"

"No," said Rubin. "He got kicked out in the Franco-Prussian War in 1870, and France was a Republic in the 1870s and, in fact, ever since. Too bad, too, because Napoleon III was as crooked as a bolt of lightning. He was a conniver and an intriguer who made it to the Imperial throne by lying and cheating and he could at no time be trusted to keep his word unless you kept a gun trained on him."

Gonzalo said, "When did he die?"

Rubin said, "I'm not sure. Not long afterward, I think. Henry, would you check that little matter."

Henry did so. "He died on January 9, 1873."

Gonzalo was enthusiastic. "That's perfect. Gilbert wouldn't make snide remarks against a sitting monarch, because that would create an international incident, but—"

Rubin said, "Listen, Gilbert would not hesitate to—"

"No, no, we're just building an argument," said Gonzalo, "so let's say he wouldn't. But a king who was dead would be fair game. If it were 1877, the Pirate King might not think of Napoleon III, but if it were 1873, Napoleon III would have died only two months before; there would have been obituaries and biographies and he would be fresh in the minds of the pirates. Naturally, they would refer to the 'dirty work' he did. So that's two arguments for 1873.

Avalon said, "That won't work, Mario. Napoleon III wasn't a king. He was an Emperor. France, Germany, Austria-Hungary, and Rus-

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sia were all Empires in Victoria's time. So was Japan, for that matter. That was one reason why Victoria was so pleased with the Imperial title. Without it, every other important monarch outranked her."

"So?" said Gonzalo.

"So," said Avalon, "Tom's argument is that it had to be 1873 because Victoria was called a Queen and not a Queen-Empress. But if you're going to be so picky about titles you can't have the Pirate King talk about kings when he is referring to Napoleon III who was an Emperor."

"On this point, Jeff," said Rubin, "I side with Mario. Gilbert, as a loyal Britisher, would certainly not abate one jot of the title of Victoria. However, he isn't going to worry about some French monarch. In Gilbert's time, France was still the traditional enemy of Great Britain through a series of wars stretching back to Henry II seven centuries before."

Graff nodded. "There's something to that. In *Ruddigore*, there's a song by the sailor, Richard Dauntless, which makes mild fun of the French and calls them 'froggies', 'parley-voos' and 'darned Mounseers'."

"Exactly," said Rubin. "Gilbert wouldn't worry about the precise title of a darned Mounseer, so that's two arguments in favor of 1873."

Graff said, "Yes, but they're—" He wiggled his hand in a rapid roll.

"All right, then," said Avalon. "Anything else?"

Silence.

Finally Halsted muttered, "I wish I knew the play better. Listen, Herb, did you say the pirates were members of the House of Peers?"

"They have to be," said Graff. "When the Major-General hears that the pirates are noblemen gone wrong, he says, 'No Englishman unmoved that statement hears, because, with all our faults, we love our House of Peers.' Then he goes on to say to the pirates, 'Peers will be peers, and youth will have its fling. Resume your ranks and legislative duties—' So I suppose they're part of Parliament."

"Ah," said Halsted, "then that settles it. In the 1870s, Great Britain was the dominant economic power on earth. In particular, there were heavy British investments in the United States. *If* a bunch of notorious pirates were suddenly to flood into Parliament, that would make Americans feel pretty shaky about the status of the British investments. You can't trust pirates. They might withdraw those investments. That would unsettle the American economy and—"

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"You would have the Panic of 1873," said Rubin triumphantly.

"Exactly," said Halsted.

Rubin said, "That really does it. There *was* a Panic of 1873. It was the worst economic downturn the United States had up to the Great Depression of the 1930s."

Avalon said, "There you are, Herb. Three arguments in favor of 1873. Each one by itself is weak perhaps, but surely all three together carry conviction. One: Victoria would have been referred to as Queen in 1873, but not in 1877 when she was Empress as well. Two: Napoleon III would have been referred to as an example of a royal conniver in 1873, soon after he died, but not in 1877 by which time he might have been out of mind. Three: the return of the pirates to Parliament could and did set off an American depression in 1873, but there was none in 1877."

Graff nodded gloomily. "Yes, that's very nice and I hope it works. Maybe it will work. Anyway, I want to thank you all very much. If I can get Appelbaum to see the force of these arguments—" He paused, then said wistfully, "There wouldn't be anything else you could feed me, would there? Something, I mean, that doesn't have all that subtle logic. Something simple."

His eyes went from one to the other and met only blankness.

Then Gonzalo said, "If you want something simple, we ought to ask Henry. He hasn't said anything yet."

Graff looked up at Henry curiously. "Don't tell me you go for Gilbert and Sullivan too, Henry."

"Not quite, sir," said Henry. "I have heard selections from the operettas on occasion, but I have never attended a performance of any of them."

"Oh, well," said Graff.

"Nevertheless—" said Henry, and stopped.

Avalon said, "Go on, Henry. If you've got argument number four backing 1873, so much the better."

"That is the point, Mr. Avalon, I haven't. I admire the ingenuity of the three arguments you have presented and I am rather embarrassed to have to say anything against them."

"You mean we're all wrong, Henry?" said Rubin.

"I'm afraid so, Mr. Rubin. The dull fact is that 1873 is quite impossible as the time of the action, as one can very simply demonstrate on the basis of what has already been said."

Graff said, "Impossible? You mean all those logical arguments aren't any good?"

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"Completely useless."

"Why?"

Henry said, "Dr. Drake sang a couple of lines from the Major-General's song earlier in the evening. The Major-General, if I heard him correctly, boasted that he knew all the airs from that infernal nonsense, *Pinafore*."

"Damn!" said Rubin. "Of course!"

"Yes, sir. As Dr. Drake said, *Pinafore* was an early play of Gilbert and Sullivan's, earlier than *The Pirates of Penzance*. While I was checking the various points in the encyclopedia, as requested, I found, for myself, that *Pinafore* was produced in 1878. We might imagine that the Major-General, in view of his high rank, might somehow have gotten an advance look at the music when it was being written in 1877 and could have whistled the airs. No amount of twisting or logic chopping could explain his being able to whistle the airs in 1873."

Graff's round face had widened in a smile. "Of course. No argument any more, no logic, no fancy reasoning. The Major-General mentions *Pinafore* and that's it. The time of action has to be 1877 and Gilbert forgot, or maybe he didn't know, that 1900 was not a leap year. Mentz will have to give in, and we can go ahead. Thank you, Henry—but how is it I didn't see that?"

"Or I?" said Drake. "After all, I sang the verses."

Henry said, "I appear to be gifted with a simple mind, gentlemen—if you wish the simple explanation."

"Q"

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a *NEW* short story by

BARBARA OWENS

It was a crazy old house, rundown, faded, rotting. "The whole house leaned sideways on its supports like a tired old wino." And all the barrio knew the house and its inhabitant—Crazy Hilda—and left her alone, shunned her as if she were a witch. Even El Lobo, once king of the barrio, once the most fearless of them all, even El Lobo was afraid . . .

THE MUSIC IN HIS VEINS

by BARBARA OWENS

Night air seeped into the streets of the barrio. It penetrated his lightweight shirt, trailing cold kisses along his ribs and belly. He hugged himself with skinny arms and shifted his cramped position in the bushes. He watched the house.

Everything around him sulked in the day's leftover heat. The air sagged, pumped full of spice and smog; in the streetlight it shone a brassy yellow. Only shadowed pockets like his thickened with cold—the Pacific come to reclaim the land. It didn't matter to him. He was almost always cold. Only when he could afford to put the music in his veins did warmth come. He clutched himself tighter. He needed the music now—needed it bad. He blinked away the blurring in his eyes and watched the house.

She was talking to Martin, the small murmur of her voice deadened in the filled room. Seated on the backless rocker, she picked through the contents of the paper bag at her feet and her voice was accusing.

"They're all animals. All. Ach, it's a terrible thing to be one small woman alone at the mercy of this world. They pester me, Martin,

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watch me from the back sides of their eyes. They want my things. They don't think I know. Everything I have—they want to come in and take it all away."

She stopped, struck by an item just pulled from the bag. She held it close to the feeble light from the guttering candle on the hearth. It was a baby's blanket, badly stained, old and tattered, but she pulled it over her matted hair and fastened it under her chin. It was soft and warm. Her eyes wandered to those of the young soldier in the picture on the mantel, his squared shoulders stiff and proud.

"Ach," she murmured, "here I am old, alone, and afraid. What will become of me, Martin? What will they do to me?"

The night deepened. Tony guessed it must be close to midnight. Once he'd had a watch—a big gold one with numbers that glowed in the dark. But he didn't have it any more—where?—gone for music in his veins, like all the rest.

He shook his head. His eyes played tricks on him; he'd stared at the house too long. It faded away like a ghost house. Inside his head it was red and hot; he pictured his brain glowing and smoking like coals at a barbecue. He shook his head again—violently—the cold sweat streaking his face flew off and speckled the bush's dusty leaves. Her house faded back into view.

It was a crazy old house—as crazy as she was. Rundown, faded to no color, it squatted on four concrete supports, the whole house raised two feet off the ground. At one time wooden latticework had aproned that bare space all round; the years had left gaping holes in it and soft rotting boards. The front porch sagged into wooden mushy steps—the whole house leaned sideways on its supports like a tired old wino. The windows were blind, broken, with things stuffed into the holes, and every window was walled by Crazy Hilda's possessions.

No one Tony knew had ever seen the inside, but he was sure it was the same as the yard, stacked and piled with forty years of rubbish that Crazy Hilda brought home daily in sacks, grocery carts, and little boys' wagons. The yard was a hulking nightmare of mountains and tunnels through trash and garbage. The stench was powerful, the shadows were black, and Tony shivered.

All the barrio knew Crazy Hilda and they left her alone. She'd been there longer than anyone he knew. He couldn't remember when he hadn't seen her—shuffling through the streets in men's baggy trousers, an old shirt or sweater and something tied over her

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wild gray hair. When he was little he and the other children used to chase her, throw things at her.

Once, when he was about seven, he surprised her going through the trash cans behind his uncle's bar. He froze, unable to move, and she looked up and saw him. He was convinced she was a witch—she was dirty and smelled bad, and her yellowed teeth had little black spots; he wanted to run but she nailed him to the ground with her clear blue eyes. Tony had never seen blue eyes up close before. There was wild magic in them—they held him in that one spot like sharp blue icicles and all his strength ran out through the holes.

She looked at him for what seemed a long time, then held out the half-eaten apple she carried and dropped it into his hand.

"Here. You eat. Make you strong and handsome."

The touch of her skin on his broke the spell. He stumbled backward and threw the apple; it hit her in the shoulder and dropped into the dirt at her feet.

He cowered, afraid to move—waited for her to make him vanish in a puff of smoke. But she only muttered something in a language he didn't understand, picked up her paper bag, and left him lying on his back in the alley.

He never saw her up close again. He was afraid of her and would cross the street to avoid coming close to her. He grew older and was Antonio, El Lobo, most fearless of them all. She was only a crazy old woman and he grinned when he strolled across streets and into doorways to escape those bright blue eyes. He was El Lobo, charmed, king of the barrio. His mother sewed silk shirts for him with her own ten fingers and when he was sixteen there was none more golden than he—no girl in the barrio would deny it.

That was three years past. Now it was not the same. He'd been seduced by the music in his veins; there was a new king of the barrio. He was an outcast, a sick lobo, maybe the last lobo of them all. Nothing mattered any more but the music, and he could think of nothing he wouldn't do to get it. Old friends turned away when they saw him; he had no home, lived in the streets, and even his mother had turned him away. He'd stolen her golden wedding band to buy the music and when he went home again she said to him through the bolted door, "Go away, Antonio. I do not know you. I have no son like you."

He preyed on the weak and helpless, and one day he thought of Crazy Hilda. Her house ended a deserted street, with dead tangled trees in the orchard around it and no near neighbor. She must have

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money—how else could she stay alive? He followed her for one week and never saw a penny leave her hand. She ate garbage and wore rags. He became certain that somewhere in those mountains of trash Crazy Hilda had hidden a fortune. He made his plans. Watching her dark house at night he dreamed—when things got bad and the shakes controlled his hollow consumed body, he thought of that money and the music it would buy.

Tony straightened—his stomach twinged. It was time. The sky was sulphur-yellow, murky—the surrounding streets quiet, sullen. With the red pounding in his head, he felt in his pocket for the knife. It was there. His mind caressed the image of its razored blade, felt the eager spring of it in his hand. He curled thin fingers around it, familiar; it had been used to obtain the music before.

He wiped cold sweat from his burning face. A cloud crawled across the moon—shadows hugged Crazy Hilda's house. Tony swallowed, thought about the music; he stepped from his protective shield of bushes, the knife firm in his fingers, and started stealthily across the street.

Hilda was excited by the day's find. The baby blanket-scarf warmed her thin old neck and there'd been three firm tomatoes in the bin behind the supermarket. She sucked at them now with a pleasure marred only by the regret she had no salt. Except for the faint glow emitted by the candle, the room was black, windows swallowed by walls of magazines, newspapers, boxes, broken appliances, toys, machine parts, furniture, and clothing. All three other rooms in the house were the same. Narrow paths and tunnels led from one to the other. Hilda had no electricity and needed none—she knew every inch and every item in her house and yard by heart.

She rocked on the backless rocker, licked tomato juice from dirty fingers, and regarded the day's real treasure. The ring fit her little finger. It was real gold and held a dark red stone that glowed richly in the light. She'd found it tucked against a curb where its owner had probably lost it getting in or out of a car. Hilda fell on it, hid it deep in the folds of her clothing, and left the day's work unfinished to hurry home and gloat. Once or twice before she'd found good pieces of jewelry, but this one was the best. She stroked it tenderly; the red stone warmed her fingers. She raised her eyes to Martin's picture on the mantel.

"In the homeland, when we were children, you promised me a stone the color of heart's blood. And here it is. But I must hide it.

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They'll try to take it from me." The picture's unsmiling gaze met hers. Hilda sighed. "You promised many things, Martin. A fine life in America, leather soft as butter for my feet, a cleaning woman to scrub my floors. Why, Martin? Why did you bring me to this loud uncivilized country? I have difficulty here. I'm afraid of these people—I've never known what they expect from me."

She fell silent, fractured memories clouding her uncertain mind. A time of newness with Martin in California—sweet blue air and warm fertile sounds and smells of his dairy herd. Musical notes from the milk cans as he started his daily deliveries. She worked in the garden and orchard—canning, stewing, jelling. Many came to the little produce stand in those days. Then it was gone. She was alone and afraid. Martin had always told her it was necessary to be prepared for any change of circumstance—to have facilities at hand to deal with it. She had no facilities.

So she started to venture forth. She had little money, so she took things—castoffs, things people didn't want. Hilda wanted them all. She didn't always know what for, but if she had enough things she would be prepared. Gradually it became her way of life. As the money dwindled and her sole function was survival in a land where she knew no one, her things became all. With them she was safer, she had something that was stable. They would see her through.

A thin squeak sounded somewhere; with rooms filled to their tops as they were, directions of sounds were difficult to locate. Hilda reached for the old bent poker propped against the hearth. Many a rat had met its maker at the poker's end—she kept it close beside her even when she slept.

She rocked on, surrounded by her possessions, studying the ring's red glow in the candle's flame. Something brushed furtively against the weathered boards outside. Hilda didn't hear.

Nothing was in his mind now—just the red and promise of the music. He left the crumbled walkway and crouched against a pile of tires that towered over his head—how had that crazy old woman gotten them up there? His eyes wouldn't adjust to the dark—the nearest streetlight was two blocks away and jumbled piled peaks in the yard blotted out any help from the moon. Tony's shirt stuck to his thin body; sweat oozed from his underarms and trickled down his sides.

He felt his way through the trash to the house's side wall and clung there, getting his bearings, listening for any sounds of alarm

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inside. Something skittered out from under the house, squeaked and rustled away into the mounds of rotting garbage. Tony leaned against the wall, feeling dead rank earth smells from the open space under the house mingling with sweet decaying odors in the yard; both combined to sink into every pore in his body. A dirty face with wide blue eyes floated through the redness in his mind. He raised an arm to swipe his forehead. He was El Lobo, most fearless of them all.

The back. Experience had taught him it was easiest to get in there. Clutching the knife in his left hand, he started again, feeling his way along the wall. A high pile of old shoes rose on his left—he could smell the aged leather. He stepped carefully in the blackness, but not carefully enough. His left foot sank into a soft mound to his ankle—it was cold and slippery against his bare skin.

He stumbled against the house as he jerked his foot free; an overpowering stench of rotting fruit engulfed him. Through the surge of red behind his eyes came the first signs of bright white rage. He was El Lobo, master of the weak and helpless. Something was in his way—something dirty, pesky, insignificant. He slid his thumb to the catch that would release the long steel blade and edged on toward the house's rear.

She'd never belonged here. She didn't fit into the country the way Martin did—didn't understand the people, and as time passed, didn't want to. She wanted to go home—to the fields and simple life she'd known. There were still many resentments in the people here about the war. Martin warned her never to divulge his service in the Kaiser's army, and he ingratiated himself with the coarse Americans in a way Hilda never could. But she stayed, because Martin was her husband and her place was with him.

Then Martin was gone and she was alone in a crazy country with no one to turn to. She lived with daily fear. Over the years people began to avoid her, gradually almost not to notice her. Several generations of children had chased and harassed her, but no one came to the house any more. Word had gotten out: she wouldn't answer the door—and the smell would turn over even the strongest stomach.

There'd been a handful she remembered over the long years—a man who'd said he was searching for a lost dog, a young traveler on a bicycle who wandered into her dead-end street asking for directions, a bold young woman selling raffle tickets for something,

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a turkey maybe, for the USO during that second war. By this time, however, Hilda had come to realize they were all there to spy on her collection of things, so she was very careful how she acted.

Ach, it was a hard life without Martin. She ran her tongue across the back of her aching teeth and wished she had another tomato. Or a banana. Or a sausage. Gott, how long had it been since she'd tasted a bit of meat?

In the back of the house a faint groan of metal broke the silence. The air changed imperceptibly, an invisible wave caused by the opening of a door. Hilda was on her feet in an instant, the candle's flame extinguished in the next. She listened, motionless, swallowing her heart. She felt it—somewhere in the middle of her precious belongings was one of them. He'd caught her napping, he was inside her house. She was old and afraid. Ach, what would happen to her now?

It was drawing the breath from his body. He'd grown up in poverty and decay, but nothing compared to the smell that lived in Crazy Hilda's house. It filled and rotted his lungs in seconds; his first thought was to turn and run, get away from this nightmare of a place before the odor dissolved him down to the fillings in his teeth. He gagged, forcing down nausea, tasting the air on his teeth and tongue, so thick it almost had real substance. Run! But the music—his body craved it, refused to do his bidding. His starving body wouldn't run until it had Hilda's fortune for the music.

A sound. Where? Where was he now? He couldn't see his fingers before his eyes. He tried to remember the layout of the house he'd watched. Was there another room this way? Or that? He reached out cautiously and touched a pile of wooden pieces—smooth, rounded, slightly bigger than his fingers. Baby cribs? Chair backs? He edged right, arm outstretched, knife taut in his other hand. He couldn't see. Childish horrors of walking into monsters, spiders in his face, the sick breath of something unspeakable close to the back of his neck—this house was a child's worst dream come true, and for a moment Tony forgot why he was here.

Then the red receded and he remembered. He was here for Crazy Hilda's fortune and he'd have it—his first killing for the music had upset him, but that was when he was still alive inside. Now the music was all that mattered.

His fingertips identified a doorframe—sticky, greasy. With a crooked elbow protecting his face he eased through . . .

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She waited at the doorway to what had been the kitchen when the house was a house and not storage for her things. She could hear him breathing—ragged gasps he tried to stifle in his throat. Her breath was the same, but she held it inside. He was here to harm her, to take her things. She sank against an old chair covered with a blanket. She wanted to cry. No, Martin, you're wrong. I'm not strong. I'm afraid! He's one of those other ones. Why won't they leave me alone? Help me, Martin! He's going to—

The ring. Hilda blinked in the darkness and raised the hand to her mouth. He knew about the ring. That's what he was after. He was going to take her beautiful red ring. She lunged back from the door and metal rang loudly in the stillness.

As the metallic echoes faded, Tony cowered behind the protective wall of cartons where he'd leaped at the first sound. His eyes bugged until they burned, trying to pierce the black from where the sound had come—somewhere off his left ear. Was she there? He couldn't even distinguish shadows. She could be standing right in front of him and he wouldn't be able to see her. His shoulders started to tremble. She was a witch. She could see in the dark, track him down with her magic blue eyes. He had to have the advantage—surprise her. He'd have to keep moving.

Hugging the floor, he released the catch on the knife. It made a soft dangerous snick that renewed his confidence. Guiding himself with one hand, he duckwalked carefully through the tunneled maze of trash.

Her feet fell noiselessly, following the familiar contours of her world. She was numb with fear. She couldn't hear his breathing any more. Which room was he in? Soundlessly she passed into the back room and felt for the door. It hung open—she wasn't imagining it then. She felt blood drain from her face.

Which way to go? Quick, back to the room she'd just left. Martin was there. No, only Martin's picture. Martin was gone. Was that right? She stopped, cocking her head in the darkness. Yes. She saw Martin standing in the cheerful light from the fireplace, shoulders straight and military as if he awaited the Kaiser's commendation. His face was ruddy and guileless, his deep voice patient, firm.

"You must be brave, Hilda. You're strong. You'll have a fine life."

"No. You can't. I'm in a strange land. I'm afraid. You can't leave me. What will I do?"

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"I'm sorry. You've been a good wife. But I've found another. You mustn't try to stand in my way."

"Is it one of your fancy women? I know about them. You leave me for one of them?"

"She's different, Hilda. American women are warm and exciting. I care nothing for you any more."

"What will happen to me?"

"I don't care, you see, Hilda. It's nothing to me now."

Oh, Martin.

And now another comes who cares nothing—only to satisfy his own desires.

Hilda edged through another doorway and knew the intruder was in this room.

He couldn't see her but he felt her pass. It startled him so that the presence was gone before he'd had time to lunge with the knife. Where'd she come from so quickly? And where did she go? Now there wasn't sound or movement in the room, yet she hadn't had time to weave through the aisles and leave. Was she standing there? Just beside him? With her yellow rotting teeth grinning? Tony's shirt was soaking wet. His stomach rolled and knotted. It was getting bad now. He had to have the music soon. Sweat leaked into his eyes. It was time for him to end it.

Hilda pressed into the corner against an old birdcage. She was within arm's reach of the doorway. She would wait. Sooner or later he'd come through. Martin had taken her heart. This one would not take her ring.

Tony shook badly now. His knees trembled as he stood up and inched onward. He didn't know where he was, had lost all sense of direction. The whole house was a horror movie of blind alleys and wrong turns. The dark and the smell. He'd find her now and kill her. Make a light and take the treasure. Maybe even set fire to the whole damn place and rid the barrio of its rotting presence. Sweat dripped off his nose. He didn't know the sob was coming. It slipped out, surprising him, and the hushed, breathless word.

"Hilda?"

She heard his voice—beyond the doorframe, coming closer. It was young, surprisingly childish. She couldn't understand the language,

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thought she heard her own name, but it was soft, rushing like a river, pleading. The fear in it matched her own. But she was wise. She knew their tricks, the devils. He wouldn't have her ring.

Oh, God, just let me out of here. Help me find a way out. Craving for the music raged inside him, fear sped on icy feet all over his outside skin. He cried, called for his mother, lapsed into his own tongue, begged Hilda to come out, come out and show herself so he'd stop seeing those faceless blue eyes in every corner of the room.

He panicked, fell into unseen obstacles, staggered back, and lunged on. Things toppled, rang, clattered. He tried to run but there was no room; he bumped into a doorway and burst through and knew she was there. He felt her move and saw her eyes even in the darkness—cold and blue coming for him. A lifetime of survivor's instinct forced up the arm that held the steel blade.

The candle fluttered wildly as she bent to look into his face. He lay on his back, half in one room, half in another. His eyes were open, crazed with fear. Hilda bent closer. She didn't know him. Why had he come to make her afraid?

Her breathing had slowed, she was calmer now. The poker had caught him beside the left eyebrow. Blood the color of her ring seeped into his ear. Hilda clasped herself, holding tightly until she was no longer afraid. She wasn't strong. And she was old. How much longer could she go on?

The candle picked out the gleam of the knife half hidden under the boy's body. She remembered the feel of it slicing through her sleeve, harmlessly parting fabric but missing flesh. She picked it up and examined it more closely. It was a fine knife. A thing worth having. The boy didn't need it any more. She placed it on the hearth by the poker, then sat on the rocker and rested.

He was only a skinny boy, but still heavy for her. She sighed. Ach, when would they leave her alone?

Hilda gripped the cuffs of Tony's trousers in small gnarled hands and pulled. She'd stop to rest many times before this night was over. Before Tony was safely hidden in the moist earth under the house. With the man who came looking for his lost dog, the cyclist trying to find his way, the loud lady from the USO. And Martin.

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a *NEW* short story by

FRANCIS M. NEVINS, Jr.

"When the fingerprint report came back from F.B.I. headquarters the next day, they knew a part of the story. The rest they never learned, and would not have believed if someone had told them."

The point is, no matter which side you're working on these days, things can get mighty complicated . . .

COUNTERPLOT

by FRANCIS M. NEVINS, Jr.

The weekend ice storm made the motel cleaning women late for work on Monday morning. The woman assigned to the rooms at the end of the west wing gave a ritual tap on the door of 114, then used her passkey and stepped in. When she saw what lay on the green shag carpet she shrieked and went careening down the corridor in terror. The Cody police arrived ten minutes later. When the fingerprint report came back from F.B.I. headquarters the next day, they knew a part of the story. The rest they never learned, and would not have believed if someone had told them.

She followed instructions precisely. The Northwest jet touched down at Billings just before 5:00 P.M. on Friday, and by 5:30 she had rented a car from the Budget booth near the baggage-claim area. As the sun dropped over the awesomely close mountaintops she was crossing the Montana border into Wyoming. The two-lane blacktop rose and fell and wound among the magnificent mountains like a scenic railway, bringing her to the edge of Cody around 8:00.

She'd been told there would be a reservation for her at the Great Western Motel in the name of Ann Chambers. There was. She checked in, unpacked the two smaller suitcases, left the large gray

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Samsonite case at the back of the room closet, locked. Then she bathed, changed to a blue jumpsuit, turned on the TV, and settled in to wait. Until Monday morning if necessary. Those were the instructions.

Friday passed, and Saturday, and Sunday. She heard the harsh sound of frozen rain falling on the streets, the screech of brakes, the dull whine of car motors refusing to start. The storm didn't affect her. She stayed in the room, watching local television and reading a pile of paperback romances she had brought with her. Three times a day she would stride down the corridor to the coffee shop for a hasty meal. The only other customers were a handful of pickup-truck cowboys who kept their outsized Stetsons on as they ate flamboyantly. None of them could be the man she was waiting for. She wondered if the storm would keep him from coming.

At 10:00 P.M. on Sunday, while she was sitting on the bed bundled in blankets, boredly watching a local TV newscast, a quick triple knock sounded on her door. She sprang up, smoothed the bedcovers, undid the chain bolt, and opened two inches. "Yes?"

"Software man." The words were exactly what she expected.

"Hardware's here," she replied as instructed, and cautiously drew back the door to let him in. He was heavy-set and rugged-looking, about 40, wearing a three-quarter-length tan suede jacket with sheepskin collar. When he took off his mitten cap she saw he was partially bald. He threw his jacket on the bed and inspected her.

"You sure ain't Frank Bolish," he said. "So who are you?"

"Arlene Carver. One of Frank's assistants." She held out her hand to him and took a chance. "If you read his columns you've probably seen my name mentioned. I do investigative work for him."

"Never read his columns," the man grunted. "I don't think newspapermen should be allowed to attack public officials the way Bolish does. Prove who you are." His accent was heavily Western, almost like Gary Cooper's but too soft and whispery as if he had a sore throat. Taking small steps, she backed toward the formica-topped round table at the room's far end where her oversized handbag lay.

"Hold it right there," the man ordered. "I'll find your ID myself." He strode long-legged across the room, passing her cautiously, reached for the bag, and shook its contents out on the bed.

"There's no gun," she told him, trying to control the irritation she was beginning to feel, "and the money's not there either. Do you think I'm a fool?"

He pawed through her alligator wallet, studying the array of

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plastic cards in their window envelopes. "Okay, so your name's Arlene Carver and you live in Bethesda, Maryland. That's close enough to Washington all right, but what tells me you're with Bolish?"

"How do I know you're Paxton?" she demanded. "I was told he was a skinny guy with thick gray hair. You're two hundred pounds and could use a toupee."

"I never claimed I was Paxton." He tugged a bulging pigskin wallet from his hip pocket and passed her a business card. "Ted Gorman, from Cheyenne. Private investigator. Paxton got cold feet Friday, hired me to drive up to Cody and make the delivery for him." He took a long careful breath. "He said either Bolish himself or his chief assistant Marty Lanning would pick it up."

"Frank has to be on a TV show tomorrow morning and Marty's down with flu," she said.

He gazed coldly at her. She knew he was trying to decide if she was genuine or an impostor. "Come *on*, man!" she told him impatiently. "I knew the stupid password and I knew what Paxton looks like. Give me the damn videotape!"

"Not yet." He perched himself on the round table and pointed a finger at her. "If you're with Bolish you'll know what's supposed to be on the tape. Tell me."

"The way Frank said Paxton described it over the phone," she answered slowly, "it's a videocassette made with a hidden camera at Vito Carbone's condo in Miami Beach. It shows Senator Vega taking a $100,000 payoff from Carbone and agreeing to sponsor some amendments to the Federal Criminal Code that the Mob wants." She paused and looked at him.

"More," he demanded.

"The videocassette was made for Angelo Generoso," she went on. "His family and the Carbones have been in an undeclared war for years. Paxton was the low-level torpedo the Generosos sent to Carbone's pad to dismantle the equipment and bring back the cassettes when it was all over. Only Paxton found out what was on that one tape, saw a chance to get rich, and disappeared with the thing instead. He'd grown up in rural Wyoming, so he came back out here to hole up till the heat died down. Then he phoned Frank in Washington and offered him the cassette for $25,000."

"Okay." The bald man nodded slightly. "That's the same story Paxton tells. You got the money?"

"Yes. You have the cassette?"

"Hold still a minute." He strode across the room and out into the

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corridor, leaving the door slightly ajar. She watched him enter the alcove down the hall that held the soft-drink machine. There was the sound of a lid being lifted, then the rumble of ice cubes being displaced. He re-entered the room rubbing the moist white protective jacket of the cassette against his shirt. "Ice machine didn't do it any harm," he said. "Let's see the money."

She bent over the bureau, pulled out the bottom drawer, and removed the Gideon Bible. Then she shook the Bible out over the bed. Twenty-five $1000 bills fluttered down from the pages onto the rumpled blanket. She picked them up and arranged them in a neat stack but did not hold them out to him.

"They could be counterfeit," the bald man muttered.

"Oh, for God's sake! This is throwaway money for Frank Bolish. Now give me the damn cassette!"

Hesitantly he placed it on the blanket beside the bills, then perched on the edge of the formica again, while she rebolted the chain lock. She then dragged the large gray Samsonite suitcase out of the closet, lifted it to the bed, and unlocked it. She took out the videocassette player, set it down on the bureau top, and used a tiny screwdriver to connect its wires with certain wires of the room television. When the player was ready she flipped the ON switch, took the cassette out of its protective jacket, and inserted it into the machine. Then she depressed the PLAY button and turned on the TV to watch the images from the cassette.

The tape ran for about twelve minutes. Its technical quality was poor, which was natural considering the secrecy in which it was made. It showed a quiet conference between two men in shirtsleeves. The older she recognized—Vito, lion of the Carbones. The younger—tall, slender, hypnotic-voiced—certainly looked like Senator Vega.The hidden camera caught the quick transfer of an envelope, the counting of the money, the careful repetition of what the senator must do in return for the gift.

She hit the STOP button before the scene had ended. "I don't like it," she said. "There's something staged-looking about that payoff. One of them's an actor, maybe both of them." She chewed her underlip nervously and turned her back for a second to switch off the TV.

When she faced him again, he was holding a small .25 aimed at her middle.

"You took a gamble and lost, lady," the bald man said. "It happens I do read Bolish's column every day, and I got a real good memory

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for names. He's never mentioned you in any of his material. Now, who the hell are you?"

She took another long deep breath to gain time. "All right," she told him then. "I—guess I gave myself away with what I said about that tape. My name is Arlene Carver but I don't work for Bolish. I'm a troubleshooter for Senator Vega. We heard rumors about a plot to smear him with a phony videotape, and then when Paxton offered the tape to Bolish one of Bolish's staff leaked the story to us. My partner managed to sidetrack the man Bolish sent out to make the pickup and I came on in his place. Look, what do you and Paxton care who pays you? The tape's a phony, but the media could crucify the senator with it, so we're willing to pay to keep it under wraps."

"Sure it's a phony. All you true believers who think Jorge Vega can pull together that good old Sixties coalition of the Hispanics and the blacks and the feminists and the Indians and the kids, you'll all swear till you're blue in the face the tape's a phony so your boy can become President in '84. Only if the tape gets out, it's Vega's finish, and you know it."

"It's no use talking politics with you," she said icily. "Take the money and leave this room, right now."

"Not quite yet." He waggled the .25 at her lazily. "You see, I still don't know who you are, lady, but I surely know who you're not. You don't work for Jorge Vega. *But I do.*"

Consternation flushed her face, and she jerked back as though he had struck her.

"Paxton didn't just make one long-distance call to Washington about that cassette," the man explained. "He offered it to Vega for the same price he wanted from Bolish. I'm a Wyoming boy, so the senator took me off my other work on his staff and asked me to get the tape from Paxton. I did. Didn't use money, just muscle. But then I decided to keep Paxton's date with Bolish, hoping I could find out what Bolish planned to print about the senator. Now, you're not with Bolish and you're not with Vega, so before I get angry and ask you the hard way, you tell me who you are and what your game is."

He took two slow steps toward her, his fingers tightening on the .25 as he moved.

"Put that toy away," she told him calmly, "before you find yourself in deep trouble." She reached inside her blouse with careful motions, pulled out a hinged leather cardholder, opened it, and held it out so he could see the gold shield and identification.

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"Oh, hell," he mumbled, and gently set down the gun on the dresser top. "Why didn't you say you were F.B.I.?"

"Well, your loyalties weren't exactly displayed on a billboard," she told him. "The Bureau heard rumors about that cassette too, and my job was to run them down. A woman on Bolish's staff leaked it to the Bureau when Paxton made him the offer. I told the truth when I said my partner intercepted Bolish's messenger and I came on in his place. Another two minutes and I would have been reading you your rights. Depending on whether that tape is real or a phony, either Vega's going to be charged with taking a bribe or some big bananas in the Mob are going to face extortion charges. I don't think you broke any Federal laws by hijacking the cassette from Paxton, but I'll keep the tape from this point on."

"I'm not so sure of that." He grinned at her, reached down to his oversized cowboy belt buckle, and disconnected it from its leather strap. From the interior of the hollow buckle he extracted a leather cardholder of his own and flipped it at her. "Damndest thing I've seen in fifteen years with the Bureau," he laughed. "Two agents playing cat and mouse with each other like this. Yeah, I've been working the case from the other side. Picked up Paxton in Laramie on Friday night and decided to keep his appointment with Bolish's messenger on the off chance I'd get something we could use against Bolish. He's written a lot of columns the Bureau doesn't appreciate."

"Nice job," she said. "You fooled me all the way. I never would have guessed you were with the Bureau." She came toward him slowly, almost seductively, until she was two steps from the corner of the dresser that held his gun.

She leaped for the .25 at the same moment his hands leaped for her throat.

Late the next morning, when she entered to clean Room 114, the cleaning woman found the two intertwined bodies—the man shot with a .25 at point-blank range, the woman strangled to death. The police quickly determined what had happened but had no idea why they had killed each other, nor could they make sense of the inordinate number of artifacts of identity found in the room, all of them turning out to be spurious.

The F.B.I. report on the two sets of fingerprints, however, proved to be helpful. The man was identified as a pistolero for the Carbone organized-crime family and the woman as an enforcer for the more progressive and affirmative-action-oriented Generosos.

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NEW by RUTH RENDELL

Your Editor first read the typescript of this story on a Friday morning in winter, and thought it beautifully written, a warm and charming reading experience. It reminded us of a story by H. G. Wells, and that is meant as a compliment to Ruth Rendell. We were sorry the story offered no obvious crime situation or, in the usual sense, a thread of detection. Surely there was a pervading sense of mystery, and a curious suspense that kept us turning the pages. But was there enough mystery to justify publishing the story in a magazine like Ellery Queen's? No, it really wasn't EQMM's cup of tea. So we placed the typescript on our desk, intending to return it with a personal note of regret.

The weekend followed, Saturday, Sunday, and from time to time each day our mind wandered back to "The Green Road." Why did the story keep coming back? And then we realized that for us, for something deeply embedded in our old memories, the story had a haunting quality, a ghostlike presence. It seemed to say, over and over: Publish me, publish me. And we couldn't help wondering if it would also haunt others. Would "The Green Road" strike a chord of empathy in other readers, excite an atavistic feeling of déjà vu in others, as it clearly had in us? And we decided there was only one way to find out . . .

THE GREEN ROAD

by RUTH RENDELL

There used to be, not long ago, a London suburban-line railway running up from Finsbury Park to Highgate, and farther than that for all I know. They closed it down before I went to live at Highgate and at some point they took up the sleepers and the rails. But the track remains and a very strange and interesting track it

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is. There are people living in the vicinity of the old line who say they can still hear, at night and when the wind is right, the sound of a train pulling up the slope to Highgate, and before it comes into the old disused station, giving its long, melancholy, hooting call. A ghost train, presumably, on rails that have long been lifted and removed.

But this is not a ghost story. Who could conceive of the ghost, not of a person but of a place, and that place having no existence in the natural world? Who could suppose anything of a supernatural or paranormal kind happening to a man like myself, who is quite unimaginative and not observant at all?

An observant person, for instance, could hardly have lived for three years only two minutes from the old station without knowing of the existence of the line. Day after day, on my way to the Underground, I passed it, glanced down unseeing at the weed-grown platforms, the broken canopies. Where did I suppose those trees were growing—rowans and Spanish chestnuts and limes that drop their sticky black juice like tar—that waved their branches in a long avenue high up in the air? What did I imagine that occasionally glimpsed valley was, lying between suburban back gardens?

You may enter or leave the line at the bridges where there are always places for scrambling up or down, and at some actual steps, much overgrown, and gates or at least gateposts. I had been walking under or over these bridges without ever asking myself what those bridges carried or crossed. It never even, I am sorry to say, occurred to me that there were rather a lot of bridges for a part of London where the only railway line, the Underground, ran deep in the bowels of the earth. I didn't think about them. As I walked under one of the brown-brick tunnels I didn't look up to question its presence or ever once glance over a parapet.

It was Arthur Kestrell who told me about the line, one evening while I was in his house.

Arthur was a novelist. I write "was," not because he has abandoned his profession for some other, but because he is dead. I am not even sure whether one would call his books novels. They truly belong in that curious category, a fairly popular genre, that is an amalgam of science fiction, fairy tale, and horror fantasy.

But Arthur, who used the pseudonym of Blaise Fastnet, was no Mervyn Peake and no Lovecraft either. Not that I had read any of his books at the time of which I am writing. But Elizabeth, my wife,

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had. Arthur used sometimes to give us one of them on publication, duly inscribed and handed to us, presented indeed, with the air of something very precious and uniquely desirable being bestowed.

I couldn't bring myself to read them. The titles alone were enough to repel me: *Kallinarth, the Cloudling; The Quest of Kallinarth; Lord of Quephanda; The Grail-Seeker's Guerdon*, and so forth. But I used somehow, without actually lying, to give Arthur the impression that I had read his latest, or I think I did. Perhaps, in fact, he saw through this, for he never inquired if I had enjoyed it or had any criticisms to make. Liz said they were "fun," and sometimes—with kindly intent, I know—would refer to an incident or portion of dialogue in one of the books in Arthur's presence.

"As Kallinarth might have said," she would say, or "Weren't those the flowers Kallinarth picked for Valaquen when she woke from her long sleep?"

This sort of thing only had the effect of making poor Arthur blush and look embarrassed. I believe that Arthur Kestrell was convinced in his heart that he was writing great literature, never perhaps to be recognized as such in his lifetime but for the appreciation of posterity. Liz, privately to me, used to call him "the poor man's Tolkien."

He suffered from periods of black and profound depression. When these came upon him he couldn't write or read or even bring himself to go out on those marathon walks ranging across north London which he dearly loved when he was well. He would shut himself up in his Gothic house in that district where Highgate and Crouch End merge, and there he would hide and suffer and pace the floors, not answering the door, still less the telephone until, after five or six days or more, the mood of wretched despair had passed.

His books were never reviewed in the press. How it comes about that some authors' work never receives the attention of the critics is a mystery, but the implication, of course, is that it is beneath their notice. This ignoring of a new publication, this bland passing over with neither a smile nor a sneer, implies that the author's work is a mere commercially motivated repetition of his last book, a slight variation on a tried and lucrative theme, another stereotyped bubbler in a long line of profitable potboilers. Arthur, I believe, took it hard. Not that he told me so. But soon after Liz had scanned the papers for even a solitary line to announce a new Fastnet novel, one of these depressions of his would settle on him and he would go into hiding behind his gray, crenelated walls.

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Emerging, he possessed for a while a kind of slow cheerfulness combined with a dogged attitude to life. It was always a pleasure to be with him, if nothing else than for the experience of his powerful and strange imagination whose vividness colored those books of his, and in conversation gave an exotic slant to the observations he made and the opinions he uttered.

London, he always insisted, was a curious, glamorous, and sinister city, hung on slopes and valleys in the north of the world. Did I not understand the charm it held for foreigners who thought of it with wistfulness as a gray Eldorado?

I who had been born in it couldn't see its wonders, its contrasts, its wickednesses.

In summer Arthur got me to walk with him to Marx's tomb, to the house where Housman wrote *A Shropshire Lad*, to the pond in the Vale of Health where Shelley sailed boats. We walked the Heath and we walked the urban woodlands and then one day, when I complained that there was nowhere left to go, Arthur told me about the track where the railway line had used to be. A long green lane, he said, like a country lane, four and a half miles of it, and smiling in his cautious way, he told me where it went. Over Northwood Road, over Stanhope Road, under Crouch End Hill, over Vicarage Road, under Crouch Hill, under Mount View, over Mount Pleasant Villas, over Stapleton Hall, under Upper Tollington Park, over Oxford Road, under Stroud Green Road, and so to the station at Finsbury Park.

"How do you get onto it?" I said.

"At any of the bridges. Or at Holmesdale Road. You can get onto it from the end of my garden."

"Right," I said. "Let's go. It's a lovely day."

"There'll be crowds of people on a Saturday," said Arthur. "The sun will be bright like fire and there'll be hordes of wild people and their bounding dogs and their children with music machines and tinned drinks." This was the way Arthur talked, the words juicily or dreamily enunciated. "You want to go up there when it's quiet, at twilight, at dusk, when the air is lilac and you can smell the bitter scent of the tansy."

"Tomorrow night then. I'll bring Liz and we'll call for you and you can take us up there."

But on the following night when we called at Arthur's house and stood under the stone archway of the porch and rang his bell, there was no answer. I stepped back and looked up at the narrow latticed

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windows, shaped like inverted shields. This was something which, in these circumstances, I had never done before. Arthur's face looked back at me, blurred and made vague by the dark, diamond-paned glass, but unmistakably his small wizened face, pale and with its short sparse beard.

It is a disconcerting thing to be looked at like this by a dear friend who returns your smile and your mouthed greeting with a dead, blank, and unrecognizing stare. I suppose I knew then that poor Arthur wasn't quite sane any more. Certainly Liz and I both knew that he had entered one of his depressions and that it was useless to expect him to let us in.

We went off home, abandoning the idea of an exploration of the track that evening. But on the following day, work being rather slack at that time of the year, I found myself leaving the office early and getting out of the tube train at Highgate at half-past four. Liz, I knew, would be out. On an impulse, I crossed the street and turned into Holmesdale Road. Many a time, walking there before, I had noticed what seemed an unexpectedly rural meadow lying to the north of the street, a meadow overshadowed by broad trees, though no more than fifty yards from the roar and stench of the Archway Road. Now I understood what it was. I walked down the slope, turned southeastward where the meadow narrowed and came onto a grassy lane.

It was about the width of an English country lane and it was bordered by hedges of buddleia on which peacock and small tortoiseshell butterflies basked. And I might have felt myself truly in the country had it not been for the backs of houses glimpsed all the time between the long leaves and the purple spires of the buddleia bushes. Arthur's lilac hour had not yet come. It was windless sunshine up on the broad green track, the clear white light of a sun many hours yet from setting. But there was a wonderful warm and rural, or perhaps I should say pastoral, atmosphere about the place. I need Arthur's gift for words and Arthur's imagination to describe it properly and that I don't have. I can only say that there seemed, up there, to be a suspension of time and also of the hurrying, frenzied bustle, the rage to live, that I had just climbed up out of.

I went over the bridge at Northwood Road and over the bridge at Stanhope Road, feeling ashamed of myself for having so often walked unquestioningly *under* them. Soon the line began to descend, to become a valley rather than a causeway, with embankments on either side on which grew small delicate birch trees and the rosebay

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willow herb and the giant hogweed. But there were no tansy flowers, as far as I could see. These are bright yellow double daisies borne in clusters on long stems and they have the same sort of smell as chrysanthemums. For all I know, they may be a sort of chrysanthemum or belong to that family. Anyway, I couldn't see any or any lilac, but perhaps Arthur hadn't meant that and in any case it wouldn't be in bloom in July.

I went as far as Crouch End Hill that first time and then I walked home by road. If I've given the impression there were no people on the line, this wasn't so. I passed a couple of women walking a labrador, two boys with bikes, and a little girl in school uniform eating a choc ice.

Liz was intrigued to hear where I had been but rather cross that I hadn't waited until she could come too. So that evening, after we had had our meal, we walked along the line the way and the distance I had been earlier, and the next night we ventured into the longer section. A tunnel blocked up with barbed wire prevented us from getting quite to the end, but we covered nearly all of it and told each other we very likely hadn't missed much by this defeat.

The pastoral atmosphere disappeared after Crouch End Hill. Here there was an old station, the platforms alone still remaining, and under the bridge someone had dumped an old feather mattress—or plucked a dozen geese. The line became a rubbish dump for a hundred yards or so and then widened out into children's playgrounds with murals—and graffiti—on the old brick walls.

Liz looked back at the green valley. "What you gain on the swings," she said, "you lose on the roundabouts." A child in a rope seat swung past us, shrieking, nearly knocking us over.

All the prettiness and the atmosphere I have tried to describe was in that first section, Highgate station to Crouch End Hill. The next time I saw Arthur, when he was back in the world again, I told him we had explored the whole length of the line. He became quite excited.

"Have you now? All of it? It's beautiful, isn't it? Did you see the foxgloves? There must be a mile of foxgloves up there. And the mimosa? You wouldn't suppose mimosa could stand an English winter and I don't know of anywhere it grows, but it flourishes up there. It's sheltered, you see, sheltered from all the frost and the harsh winds."

Arthur spoke wistfully as if the frost and harsh winds were more metaphorical than actual, the coldness of life and fate and time

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rather than of climate. I didn't argue with him about the mimosa, though I had no doubt at all that he was mistaken. The line up there was exposed, not sheltered, and even if it had been sheltered, even if it had been in Cornwall or the warm Scilly Isles, it would still have been too cold for mimosa to survive. Foxgloves were another matter, though I hadn't seen any, only the hogweed with its bracts of dirty white flowers, garlic mustard and marestail, burdock and rosebay, and the pale leathery leaves of the coltsfoot. As the track grew rural again, past Mount View, hawthorn bushes, not mimosa, grew on the embankment slopes.

"It belongs to Haringey Council." Arthur's voice was always vibrant with expression and now it had become a drawl of scorn and contempt. "They want to build houses on it. They want to plaster it with a great red sprawl of council houses, a disfiguring red naevus." Poor Arthur's writing may not have been the effusion of genius he seemed to believe, but he certainly had a gift for the spoken word.

That August his annual novel was due to appear. Liz had been given an advance copy and had duly read it. Very much the same old thing, she said to me—Kallinarth, the hero-king in his realm composed of cloud; Valaquen, the maiden who sleeps, existing only in a dream life, until all evil has gone out of the world; Xadatel and Finrael, wizard and warrior, heavenly twins. The title this time was *The Fountains of Zond.*

Arthur came to dinner with us soon after Liz had read it. We had three other guests, and while we were having our coffee and brandy I happened to say that I was sorry not to have any drambuie as I knew he was particularly fond of it.

Liz said, "We ought to have Xadatel here, Arthur, to magic you some out of the fountains of Zond."

It was a harmless, even a rather sympathetic, remark. It showed she knew Arthur's work and was conversant with the properties of these miraculous fountains which apparently produced nectar, fabulous elixirs, or whatever was desired at a word from the wizard. Arthur, however, flushed and looked deeply offended. And afterward, in the light of what happened, Liz endlessly reproached herself for what she had said.

"How were you to know?" I asked.

"I should have known. I should have understood how serious and intense he was about his work. The fountains produced—well, holy waters, you see, and I talked about it making drambuie. Oh, I know

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it's absurd, but what he wrote meant everything to him. The same passion and inspiration, and muse if you like, affected Shakespeare and Arthur Kestrell—it's just the end product that's different."

Arthur, when she had made the remark about the fountains, had said very stiffly, "I'm afraid you're not very sensitive to imaginative literature, Elizabeth," and he left the party early. Liz and I were both rather cross at the time and Liz said she was sure Tolkien wouldn't have minded if someone had made a gentle joke to him about Frodo.

A week or so after this there was a story in the evening paper to the effect that the Minister for the Environment had finally decided to forbid Haringey's plans for putting council housing on the old railway line. The Parkland Walk, as the newspaper called it. Four and a half miles of a disused branch of the London and North-Eastern Railway, was the way it was described, from Finsbury Park to Highgate and at one time serving Alexandra Palace. It was to remain in perpetuity a walking place. The paper mentioned wild life inhabiting the environs of the line, including foxes. Liz and I said we would go up there one evening in the autumn and see if we could see a fox. We never did go. I had reasons for not going near the place, but when we planned it I didn't know I had things to fear.

This was August, the end of August. The weather, with its English vagaries, had suddenly become very cold, more like November with north winds blowing; but in the last days of the month the warmth and the blue skies came back. We had received a formal thank-you note for that dinner from Arthur, a few chilly lines written for politeness' sake, but since then neither sight nor sound of him.

The Fountains of Zond had been published, and as was always the case with Arthur's, or Blaise Fastnet's, books, had been ignored by the critics. I supposed that one of his depressions would have set in, but nevertheless I thought I should attempt to see him and patch up this breach between us. On September first, a Saturday, I set off in the afternoon to walk along the old railway line to his house.

I phoned first, but there was no answer. It was a beautiful afternoon and Arthur might well have been sitting in his garden where he couldn't hear the phone. It was the first time I had ever walked to his house by this route, though it was shorter and more direct than by road, and the first time I had been up on the Parkland Walk on a Saturday. I soon saw what he had meant about the crowds who used it at the weekends. There were teenagers with transistors, giggling schoolgirls, gangs of slouching youths, mobs of children,

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courting couples, middle-aged picnickers. At Northwood Road boys and girls were leaning against the parapet of the bridge, some with guitars, one with a drum, making enough noise for a hundred.

I remember that as I walked along, unable because of the noise and the press of people to appreciate nature or the view, that I turned my thoughts concentratedly on Arthur Kestrell. And I realized quite suddenly that although I thought of him as a close friend and liked him and enjoyed his company, I had never even tried to enter into his feelings or to understand him. If I had not actually laughed at his books. I had treated them in a light-hearted cavalier way, almost with contempt. I hadn't bothered to read a single one of them, a single page of one of them.

And it seemed to me, as I strolled along that grassy path toward the Stanhope Road bridge, that it must be a terrible thing to pour all your life and soul and energy and passion into works that are remaindered in the bookshops, ignored by the critics, dismissed by paperback publishers, and taken off library shelves only by those who are attracted by the jackets and are seeking escape.

I resolved there and then to read every one of Arthur's books that we had. I made a kind of vow to myself to show an interest in them to Arthur, to make him discuss them with me. And so fired was I by this resolve that I determined to start at once, the moment I saw Arthur. I would begin by apologizing for Liz and then I would tell him (without revealing, of course, that I had so far read nothing of his) that I intended to make my way carefully through all his books, treating them as an oeuvre, beginning with *Kallinarth, the Cloudling* and progressing through all fifteen, or however many there were, up to *The Fountains of Zond*. He might think this was sarcasm, but he wouldn't keep that up when he saw I was sincere. My enthusiasm might do him positive good; it might help cure those terrible depressions which lately had seemed to come more frequently.

Arthur's house stood on this side, the Highgate side, of Crouch End Hill. You couldn't see it from the line, though you could get onto the line from it. This was because the line had by then entered its valley out of which you had to climb into Crescent Road before the Crouch End Hill bridge. I climbed up and walked back and rang Arthur's bell but got no answer. So I looked up at those Gothic lattices as I had done on the day Liz was with me and though I didn't see Arthur's face this time, I was sure I saw a curtain move. I called up to him, something I had never done before, but I had never felt it mattered before, I had never previously had this sense

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of urgency and importance in connection with Arthur.

"Let me in, Arthur," I called to him. "I want to see you. Don't hide yourself, there's a good chap. This is important."

There was no sound, no further twitch of the curtain. I rang again and banged on the door. The house seemed still and wary, waiting for me to go away.

"All right," I said through the letterbox. "Be like that. But I'm coming back. I'll go for a bit of a walk and then I'll come back and I'll expect you to let me in."

I went back down on to the line, meeting the musicians from Northwood bridge who were marching in the Finsbury Park direction, banging their drum and joined now by two West Indian boys with zithers. A child had been stung by a bee that was on one of the buddleias and an alsatian and a yellow labrador were fighting under the bridge. I began to walk quickly toward Stanhope Road, deciding to ring Arthur as soon as I got home, and to keep on ringing until he answered.

Why was I suddenly so determined to see him, to break in on him, to make him know that I understood? I don't know why and I suppose I never will know, but this was all part of it, having some definite connection, I think, with what happened. It was as if, for those moments, perhaps half an hour all told, I became intertwined with Arthur Kestrell, part of his mind almost or he part of mine. He was briefly and for that one time the most important person in my world.

I never saw him again. I didn't go back. Some few yards before the Stanhope bridge, where the line rose once more above the streets, I felt an impulse to look back and see if from there I could see his garden or even see him in his garden. But the hawthorn, small birches, the endless buddleia grew thick here and higher far than a man's height. I crossed to the right-hand, or northern, side and pushed aside with my arms the long purple flowers and rough dark leaves, sending up into the air a cloud of black-and-orange butterflies.

Instead of the gardens and backs of houses which I expected to see, there stretched before me, long and straight and raised like a causeway, a green road turning northward out of the old line. This debouching occurred, in fact, at my feet. Inadvertently, I had parted the bushes at the very point where a secondary branch left the line, the junction now overgrown with weeds and wild shrubs.

I stood staring at it in wonder. How could it be that I had never noticed it before, that Arthur hadn't mentioned it? Then I remem-

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bered that the newspaper story had said something about the line "serving Alexandra Palace." I had assumed this meant the line had gone on to Alexandra Palace after Highgate, but perhaps not, definitely not, for here was a branch line, leading northward, leading straight toward the palace and the park.

I hadn't noticed it, of course, because of the thick barrier of foliage. In winter, when the leaves were gone, it would be apparent for all to see. I decided to walk along it, check that it actually led where I thought it would, and catch a bus from Alexandra Palace home.

The grass underfoot was greener and far less worn than on the main line. This seemed to indicate that fewer people came along here, and I was suddenly aware that I had left the crowds behind. There was no one to be seen, not even in the far distance.

Which was not, in fact, so very far. I was soon wondering how I had got the impression when I first parted those bushes that the branch line was straight and treeless. For tall trees grew on either side of the path, oaks and beeches such as were never seen on the other line, and ahead of me their branches met overhead and their fine frondy twigs interlaced. Around their trunks I at last saw the foxgloves and the tansy Arthur had spoken of, and the farther I went the more the air seemed perfumed with the scent of wild flowers.

The green road—I found myself spontaneously and unaccountably calling this branch line the green road—began to take on the aspect of a grove or avenue and to widen. It was growing late in the afternoon and a mist was settling over London, as often happens after a warm day in late summer or early autumn. The slate roofs, lying a little beneath me, gleamed dully silver through this sleepy, gold-shot mist. Perhaps, I thought, I should have the good luck to see a fox.

But I saw nothing, no living thing, not a soul passed me or overtook me, and when I looked back I could see only the smooth grassy causeway stretching back and back, deserted, still, serene and pastoral, with the mist lying in fine streaks beneath and beside it. No birds sang and no breeze ruffled the feather-light, golden, downy, sweet-scented tufts of the mimosa flowers. For, yes, there was mimosa here. I paused and looked at it and marveled.

It grew on either side of the path as vigorously and luxuriantly as it grows by the Mediterranean, the gentle swaying wattle. Its perfume filled the air, and the perfumes of the humbler foxglove and tansy were lost. Did the oaks shelter it from the worst of the

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frost? Was there by chance some warm spring that flowed under the earth here, in this part of north London where there are many patches of woodland and many green spaces? I picked a tuft of mimosa to take home to Liz, to prove I'd been here and seen it.

I walked for a very long way, it seemed to me, before I finally came into Alexandra Park. I hardly know this park, and apart from passing its gates by car my only experience of it till then had been a visit some years before to take Liz to an exhibition of paintings in the palace. The point in the grounds to which my green road had brought me was somewhere I had never seen before. Nor had I ever previously been aware of this aspect of Alexandra Palace, under whose walls the road led. It was more like Versailles than a Victorian greenhouse (which is how I had always thought of the palace) and in the oblong lakes which flanked the flight of steps before me were playing surely a hundred fountains.

I looked up this flight of steps and saw pillars and arches, a soaring elevation of towers. It was to here then, I thought, right up under the very walls, that the trains had come. People had used the line to come here for shows, for exhibitions, for concerts. I stepped off onto the stone stairs, descended a dozen of them to ground level, and looked out over the park.

London was invisible, swallowed now by the white mist which lay over it like cirrus. The effect was curious, something I had never seen before while standing on solid ground. It was the view you get from an airplane when it has passed above the clouds and you look down to the ruffled tops of them. I began to walk down over wide green lawns. Still there were no people, but I had guessed it likely that they locked the gates on pedestrians after a certain hour.

However, when I reached the foot of the hill the iron gates between their Ionic columns were still open. I came out into a street I had never been in before, in a district I didn't know, and there found a taxi which took me home. On the journey I remember thinking to myself that I would ask Arthur about this curious terminus to the branch line and get him to tell me something of the history of all that grandeur of lawns and pillars and ornamental water.

I was never to have the opportunity of asking him anything. Arthur's charwoman, letting herself into the Gothic house on Monday morning, found him hanging from one of the beams in his writing room. He had been dead, it was thought, since sometime on Saturday afternoon. There was a suicide note, written in Arthur's

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precise hand and in Arthur's wordy pedantic fashion: *Bitter disappointment at my continual failure to reach a sensitive audience or to attract understanding of my writings has led me to put an end to my life. There is no one who will suffer undue distress at my death. Existence has become insupportable and I cannot contemplate further sequences of despair.*

Elizabeth told me that in her opinion it was the only review she had ever known him to have which provoked poor Arthur to kill himself. She had found it in the paper herself on that Saturday afternoon while I was out and had read it with a sick feeling of dread for how Arthur would react. The critic, with perhaps nothing else at that moment to get his teeth into, had torn *The Fountains of Zond* apart and spat out the shreds.

He began by admitting he would not normally have wasted his typewriter ribbon (as he put it) on sci-fi fantasy trash, but he felt the time had come to campaign against the flooding of the fiction market with such stuff. Especially was it necessary in a case like this where a flavor of epic grandeur was given to the action, where there was much so-called "fine writing" and where heroic motives were attributed to stereotyped characters, so that innocent or young readers might be misled into believing that this was "good" or "valuable" literature.

There was a lot more in the same vein. With exquisite cruelty the reviewer had taken character after character and dissected each, holding the exposed parts up to stinging ridicule. If Arthur had read it, and it seemed likely that he had, it was no wonder he had felt he couldn't bear another hour of existence.

All this deflected my thoughts, of course, away from the green road. I had told Liz about it before we heard of Arthur's death and we had intended to go up there together; yet somehow, after that dreadful discovery in the writing room of the Gothic house, we couldn't bring ourselves to walk so close by his garden or to visit those places where he would have loved to take us. I kept wondering if I had really seen that curtain move when I had knocked at his door or if it had only been a flicker of the sunlight. Had he already been dead by then? Or had he perhaps been contemplating what he was about to do? Just as Liz reproached herself for that remark about the fountains, so I reproached myself for walking away, for not hammering on that door, breaking a window, getting in by some means. Yet, as I said to her, how could anyone have known?

In October I did go up on to the old railway line. Someone we

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knew living in Milton Park wanted to borrow my electric drill, and I walked over there with it, going down from the Stanhope Road bridge on the southern side. Peter offered to drive me back but it was a warm afternoon, the sun on the point of setting, and I had a fancy to look at the branch line once more. I climbed up on to the bridge and turned eastward.

For the most part the leaves were still on the bushes and trees, though turning red and gold. I calculated pretty well where the turnoff was and pushed my way through the buddleias. Or I thought I had calculated well, but when I stood on the ridge beyond the hedge all I could see were the gardens of Stanhope Road and Avenue Road. I had come to the wrong place, I thought, it must be farther along. But not much farther, for very soon what had been a causeway became a valley. My branch line hadn't turned out of that sort of terrain, I hadn't had to climb to reach it.

Had I made a mistake and had it been on the *other* side of the Stanhope Road bridge? I turned back, walking slowly, making sorties through the buddleias to look northward, but I couldn't find that turnoff to the branch line anywhere. It seemed to me then that, whatever I thought I remembered, I must in fact have climbed up the embankment to reach it, and the junction must be far nearer the bridge at Crouch End Hill than I had believed. By then it was getting dark. It was too dark to go back, I should have been able to see nothing.

"We'll find it next week," I said to Liz.

She gave me a rather strange look. "I didn't say anything at the time," she said, "because we were both so upset over poor Arthur, but I was talking to someone in the Highgate Society and she said there never was a branch line. The line to Alexandra Palace went on beyond Highgate."

"That's nonsense," I said. "I can assure you I walked along it. Don't you remember my telling you at the time?"

"Are you absolutely sure you couldn't have imagined it?"

"*Imagined it?* You know I haven't any imagination."

Liz laughed. "You're always saying that but I think you have. You're one of the most imaginative people I ever knew."

I said impatiently, "Be that as it may. I walked a good two miles along that line and came out in Alexandra Park, right under the palace, and walked down to Wood Green or Muswell Hill or somewhere and got a cab home. Are you and your Highgate Society friends saying I imagined oak trees and beech trees and mimosa?

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Look, that'll prove it—I picked a piece of mimosa. I put it in the pocket of my green jacket."

"Your green jacket went to the cleaners last month."

I wasn't prepared to accept that I had imagined or dreamed the green road. But the fact remains that I was never able to find it. Once the leaves were off the trees there was no question of delving about under bushes to hunt for it. The whole northern side of the old railway line lay exposed to the view and the elements and much of its charm was lost. It became what it really always was, nothing more or less than a ridge, a long strip of waste ground running across north London, over Northwood Road, over Stanhope Road, under Crouch End Hill, over Vicarage Road, under Crouch Hill, under Mount View, over Mount Pleasant Villas, over Stapleton Hall, under Upper Tollington Park, over Oxford Road, under Stroud Green Road, and so to the station at Finsbury Park. And nowhere along its length, for I explored every inch, was there a branch line running north to Alexandra Palace.

"You imagined it," said Liz, "and the shock of Arthur dying like that made you think it was real."

"But Arthur wasn't dead then," I said, "or I didn't know he was."

My invention, or whatever it was, of the branch line would have remained one of those mysteries which everyone, I suppose, has in his life—though I can't say I have any others in mine—had it not been for a rather curious and unnerving conversation which took place that winter between Liz and our friends from Milton Park. In spite of my resolutions made on that memorable Saturday afternoon, I had never brought myself to read any of Arthur's books. What now would have been the point? He was no longer there for me to talk to about them. And there was another reason. I felt my memory of him might be spoiled if there was truth in what the critic had said and his novels were full of false heroics and sham fine writing. Better feel with whatever poet it was who wrote:

I wept as I remembered how often thou and I
Have tired the sun with talking and sent him down the sky.

Liz, however, had had her interest in *The Chronicles of Kallinarth* revived and had reread every book in the series, passing them on as she finished each to Peter and Jane. That winter afternoon in the living room at Milton Park the three of them were full of Kallinarth, cloud country, Valaquen, Xadatel, and it was they who tired the sun with talking and sent him down the sky. I sat silent, not taking part at all, but thinking of Arthur whose house was not far

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from here and who would have marveled to hear of this detailed knowledge of his work.

I don't know which word of theirs it was that caught me or what electrifying phrase jolted me out of my reverie so that I leaned forward, intent. Whatever it was, it had sent a little shiver through my body. In that warm room I felt suddenly cold.

"No, it's not in *Kallinarth, the Cloudling*," Jane was saying. "It's in *The Quest of Kallinarth*. Kallinarth goes out hunting early in the morning and he meets Xadatel and Finrael coming on horseback up the green road to the palace."

"But that's not the first mention of it. In the first book there's a long description of the avenue where the procession comes up for Kallinarth to be crowned at the fountains of Zond and—"

"It's in all the books surely," interrupted Peter. "It's his theme, his *leitmotiv*, that green road with the yellow wattle trees that leads up to the royal palace of Quephanda—"

"Are you all right, darling?" Liz asked me quickly. "You've gone as white as a ghost."

"White with boredom," said Peter. "It must be terrible for him, us talking about a book he's never even read."

"Somehow I feel I know it without having read it," I managed to say.

They changed the subject. I didn't take much part in that either, I couldn't. I could only think, it's fantastic, it's absurd, I couldn't have got into his mind or he into mine, that couldn't have happened at the point of his death. Yet what else?

And I kept repeating over and over to myself, he reached his audience, he reached his audience at last.

"Q"

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a *NEW* short story by

JOHN LUTZ

You are about to attend a bullfight . . . "Lieutenant Castillo felt the excitement stir in him, the primal thrill he felt even as a child when his father had brought him to the bullring" . . .

MORTAL COMBAT

by JOHN LUTZ

It is said that in Mexico the only event that begins on time is the bullfight. Police Lieutenant Rafael Castillo knew this to be true, so it was ten minutes to four when he walked with the rest of a large crowd through the main gate of Plaza Mexico. Manolo Ruiz, the fast-rising matador from Merida, was to fight the first and fourth bulls that afternoon. Fortunately this spectacle was to take place on Castillo's day off, so he was pleased to be among the more than 50,000 aficionados who would watch Ruiz practice his deadly art.

It took Castillo little time to find his seat halfway up on the sun-brightened side of the huge stadium. No sooner had he sat down and let his bulky five-foot-five frame relax in the pleasant warmth than the ceremony began. The horseman in black galloped his steed across the dirt ring and reined to a halt before the judge's box, sweeping off his plumed hat and sitting impatiently in the saddle while awaiting permission to begin the timeless sequence of events that would lead inexorably to death.

After receiving permission, he backed his horse across the ring and took up position in the lead of the bullfighters waiting on the sunny side of the stadium. The paseo began, moving slowly across the ring. The three matadors, having made the sign of the cross, strutted in front behind the black-coated horseman. They had visited the little chapel beside the ring and were prepared.

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Each saluted the judge's box while walking calmly to the measured music of the band. Castillo watched Ruiz, a broad-shouldered, slim-waisted man in a glittering suit of lights with pink stockings, as the procession disbanded. On Ruiz's vivid dark features was a tranquility that contrasted with the excitement now generated among the crowd.

The trumpet wailed above the sound of the band, signaling the running of the first bull. The toril doors opened immediately and the bull burst into the ring, the yellow pennants pinned to his hump flying as he lowered his head and charged the brave peones who antagonized him with their crimson and yellow capes. Ruiz watched carefully the reaction of the bull, learning what he could about its habits, discovering which horn it favored as it charged.

When he was ready, Ruiz stepped from the shelter of the burladero into the ring and made a series of passes, beautifully executed veronicas. The crowd cheered as he brought the bull to a confused standstill with a rebolera, swinging the cape gracefully around his lean body; then he turned his back on the bull and strutted away.

The overture was ended. The *tercio de varas*, the first stage of the bullfight proper, was to begin. The picadors rode into the ring on their padded horses, wielding long lances tipped with steel spikes. Castillo watched as they placed the pics carefully to reduce the strength of the bull's hump muscle so the great head hung lower.

The bull was drawn away from the horses, drums and trumpets sounded, and the banderillas were to be placed. A thunderous cheer rose from the circular stadium as Manolo Ruiz strutted out to place the banderillas himself in the bull's neck. He moved confidently toward the pawing bull, a solitary man who stood composed before the nightmare thing with horns that positioned itself to charge. Lieutenant Castillo felt the excitement stir in him, the primal thrill he'd felt even as a child when his father had brought him to the bullring.

In the quiet lull as the crowd waited for the bull's charge, Castillo's pager beeped relentlessly at him from his shirt pocket.

He cursed, watched Ruiz plant the pair of colorful banderillas perfectly, then left his seat to go down into the stadium's concrete tunnel and find a phone.

The precinct sergeant connected him immediately with Sergeant Corerra.

"I'm at Plaza Mexico," Castillo said, even before Corerra could say hello. "Ruiz is in the ring at this moment."

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"And something else is going on at this moment, I'm afraid, sir. A man named Roberto Lopez has murdered his wife on Calle Planeta. He's barricaded himself in his house and is armed."

"With a gun?"

"A machete, sir. He used that on his wife."

Castillo got the exact address from Corerra and told him they would meet there as soon as possible.

"Ruiz has good days and bad," Corerra said before hanging up. "How does he look today?"

"This is one of his better days," Castillo grunted disconsolately, and slammed down the receiver. Perhaps this wouldn't take long, he told himself. Possibly the matter would be cleared up by the time he arrived. But probably not. Above him the crowd roared as he strode toward the gate.

Castillo drove along Insurgentes, then west on the Paseo de la Reforma, past the swank hotels and Sanborn's, then north on a side street and through the Zona Rosa with its exclusive shops and restaurants that catered to rich tourists. Soon he was into one of the poorer neighborhoods of Mexico City. He consulted his map, found that he was going in the correct direction, and within half a mile made a left turn onto Planeta.

He saw the crowd immediately. Over a hundred people were being held back by at least a dozen uniformed policemen who had cordoned off part of the block. Everyone in the crowd was looking at a tiny brick building, the bottom half of which had been a leather-goods shop but was now boarded up. Rickety wooden stairs led to a second-floor door on the near side of the building. Castillo saw several officers crouching against the brick wall beneath the landing.

Sergeant Corerra was waiting for Castillo. He was a small thin man with an upturned narrow mustache and thoughtful dark eyes. Like Castillo, he was wearing civilian clothes.

"He's upstairs," Corerra said, pointing toward the door at the top of the rickety wood steps.

The door was open or completely off its hinges. Only shadow was visible inside.

"What's happened?" Castillo asked.

"Roberto Lopez and his wife Mariana rent the upper floor. An hour ago Roberto's brother went up to see them and found Mariana dead with Roberto sitting near her holding a machete. Hector, the brother, ran from there and phoned us."

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"Has anyone talked to Roberto?"

Corerra nodded. "I have. From the landing outside the door. He admits that he killed his wife. He says he is unemployed and poor and tired of struggling. They argued over the wife's infidelity. He lost his head and killed her. He told me that if I came inside he would kill me."

"Did he say where he expects all this to lead?" Castillo asked.

Corerra smiled totally without humor. "Roberto Lopez is not talking rationally. Nevertheless, I believed him when he said he would kill me."

"No doubt he said it convincingly." Castillo flicked a match to flame against the nearby lamp post and lit a half-smoked cigar he'd produced from his pocket. "Did you find out who Roberto Lopez is?"

"He has a history of mental illness manifesting itself in severe depression. Sometimes suicidal. A violent man."

"And a sad one. Has he a criminal record?"

"Three charges of assault. One conviction, five years ago. He is on parole." Again the humorless smile. "Obviously he has violated the terms of his parole."

"And just as obviously," Castillo said, "I must try to talk to Roberto Lopez."

He smoked the cigar to a half-inch stub, then ground it out on the pavement with his heel. The still smoldering remains he kicked into the gutter. Then he borrowed Corerra's revolver, tucked it beneath his shirt, and walked toward the wooden stairway leading to the open door and the shadows beyond.

The stairs creaked loudly as he climbed them. He did not try to conceal his presence. On the narrow landing he stood motionless to one side of the doorway. There was no sound from inside. A peculiar odor of sweat and blood and animal fear wafted out to compound Castillo's own fear. The sun seemed suddenly very bright and hot. Castillo found himself thinking of Manolo Ruiz standing beneath that same sun in the bullring at Plaza Mexico. Was the bull dead by now? Or was Ruiz?

"Roberto Lopez!" Castillo called. "This is Police Lieutenant Castillo! We need to talk!"

The silence inside was unbroken.

Castillo waited several moments, wondering if Roberto Lopez had used the machete on himself. He was ashamed to find himself hoping that was so. He glanced down and saw the crowd, the policemen, staring up at him, their faces blank yet expectant.

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"I'm going to come in, Roberto," Castillo said loudly to the silence. "Alone, only to talk."

When it was apparent that he was again to go unanswered, Castillo moved into the open doorway, paused to let his eyes become accustomed to the dimness, then stepped inside.

His gaze riveted on what was left of the woman, and his courage shriveled as he imagined the rage that must have been behind such butchery. A faint sound to his left made him suck in his breath harshly and turn.

Roberto Lopez was standing beside the doorway to the kitchen. He was a huge man wearing dark shorts and an untucked white shirt patterned with blood. His arms hung at his sides limply, and from his right hand dangled a machete so long that its blade almost touched the floor.

He said, "You should not have come in here, Lieutenant Castillo."

For a moment no reply came from Castillo's fear-numbed tongue. "It is my job," he managed to say at last, in a voice whose calmness surprised him.

"I killed her," Roberto Lopez said, pointing with the machete to his dead wife.

"Yes," Castillo answered in the same quiet voice, "and now it's time to come with me, to sit down and talk about what has happened."

"You want to lock me up."

"No," Castillo said, "I don't want to. I can promise that you won't be harmed."

"Can you promise that I won't be locked up?"

"No."

"I've been locked up before. I won't be ever again. Mariana is better off than I am now."

"That doesn't have to be true," Castillo said, "if you'll come with me."

"No matter how many of you they send here for me," Roberto Lopez said in a quavering voice, "no matter how many lies you tell me, I'll never go with you."

"You must try to think reasonably for—"

Without the slightest change of expression on his broad face, Roberto Lopez raised the machete and charged Castillo.

Even as he ducked, Castillo was groping for the gun beneath his shirt, cursing himself for having decided to leave it concealed so as not to upset Lopez. He heard the machete slash air above his head

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and felt the icy rush of its passing. He rolled to the right on the hard floor, his heels clattering. The machete thunked into the wood a few inches from his face. He scrambled into a corner, gun drawn.

The effort of pulling the machete from the floor had caused Roberto Lopez to stumble backward and half fall against a threadbare chair. He laughed an oddly melodic, empty laugh, stood up straight, and again charged Castillo.

Castillo squeezed the trigger over and over in reflex action.

The bulk of Roberto Lopez struck the floor near him in a lifeless heap. Castillo heard thunderous footsteps on the stairs outside. His eyes darted to the left, to the broad machete blade embedded in the wall beside his head.

Shadows played across the scene as one after another the police poured into the room, guns at the ready.

"He's dead!" someone said. "They're all dead!"

"No," Castillo said, "not all of them, thank God."

And Corerra was helping him up.

By the time Castillo got back to Plaza Mexico, Ruiz had just finished killing his second bull. It must have been a grand performance. He had been awarded both ears and was parading around the arena, followed by his assistants who were tossing back the hats, coats, and various objects that the crowd was sailing into the ring in wild tribute. Again Manolo Ruiz had faced and defied death, with courage and grace.

The drag mules were hauling the dead bull from the ring by the chains fastened around its horns. They were dragging it very slowly out of respect for the fight it had made, while the crowd demonstrated its adulation for both toro and torero.

Standing in the midst of the cheering crowd, Castillo looked at the bull and wondered if perhaps Roberto Lopez, all his impoverished life goaded toward a final few minutes of rage-filled mortal combat, deserved at least such a tribute. True, he had murdered his wife, who also certainly deserved better, and yet he was a man and this was an animal.

But Roberto Lopez would be buried in a pauper's grave. And Rafael Castillo would continue to do his job without adulation. Without recognition. Without thanks.

Ruiz strutted past in the bullring, smiling handsomely and waving, and Castillo began to cheer with the rest of the crowd.

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a crime story by

PAUL BOWLES

Paul Bowles's "The Eye" is one of the 25 stories in THE BEST AMERICAN SHORT STORIES 1979, *edited and introduced by Joyce Carol Oates with Shannon Ravenel. In her introduction Joyce Carol Oates describes "The Eye" as "laconic, chill, passionless . . . which nevertheless possesses an uncanny suspenseful power." In his review of the collection in "The New York Times Book Review" (November 4, 1979), Reynolds Price says that Bowles achieves a "stunning union of tone and matter . . . a perfect story."*

THE EYE

by PAUL BOWLES

Ten or twelve years ago there came to live in Tangier a man who would have done better to stay away. What happened to him was in no way his fault, notwithstanding the whispered innuendos of the English-speaking residents. These people often have reactions similar to those of certain primitive groups: when misfortune overtakes one of their number, the others by mutual consent refrain from offering him aid, and merely sit back to watch, certain that he has called his suffering down upon himself. He has become taboo, and is incapable of receiving help. In the case of this particular man, I suppose no one could have been of much comfort; still, the tacit disapproval called forth by his bad luck must have made the last months of his life harder to bear.

His name was Duncan Marsh, and he was said to have come from Vancouver. I never saw him, nor do I know anyone who claims to have seen him. By the time his story reached the cocktail-party

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circuit he was dead, and the more irresponsible residents felt at liberty to indulge their taste for myth-making.

He came alone to Tangier, rented a furnished house on the slopes of Djamaa el Mokra—they were easy enough to find in those days, and correspondingly inexpensive—and presently installed a teen-age Moroccan on the premises to act as night-watchman. The house provided a resident cook and gardener, but both of these were discharged from their duties, the cook being replaced by a woman brought in at the suggestion of the watchman. It was not long after this that Marsh felt the first symptoms of a digestive illness which over the months grew steadily worse. The doctors in Tangier advised him to go to London. Two months in hospital there helped him somewhat. No clear diagnosis was made, however, and he returned here only to become bedridden. Eventually he was flown back to Canada on a stretcher, and succumbed there shortly after.

In all this there was nothing extraordinary; it was assumed that Marsh had been one more victim of slow poisoning by native employees. There have been several such cases during my five decades in Tangier. On each occasion it has been said that the European victim had only himself (or herself) to blame, having encouraged familiarity on the part of a servant. What strikes the outsider as strange is that no one ever takes the matter in hand and inaugurates a search for the culprit, but in the total absence of proof there is no point in attempting an investigation.

Two details complete the story. At some point during his illness Marsh told an acquaintance of the arrangements he had made to provide financial aid for his night-watchman in the event that he himself should be obliged to leave Morocco; he had given him a notarized letter to that effect, but apparently the boy never tried to press his claim. The other report came from Dr. Halsey, the physician who arranged for Marsh's removal from the house to the airport. It was this last bit of information which, for me at least, made the story take on life. According to the doctor, the soles of Marsh's feet had been systematically marked with deep incisions in the form of crude patterns; the cuts were recent, but there was some infection. Dr. Halsey called in the cook and the watchman: they showed astonishment and dismay at the sight of their employer's feet, but were unable to account for the mutilations. Within a few days after Marsh's departure, the original cook and gardener returned to take up residence, the other two having already left the house.

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The slow poisoning was classical enough, particularly in the light of Marsh's remark about his provision for the boy's well-being, but the knife-drawn designs on the feet somehow got in the way of whatever combinations of motive one could invent. I thought about it. There could be little doubt that the boy was guilty. He had persuaded Marsh to get rid of the cook that came with the house, even though her wages had to continue to be paid, and to hire another woman (very likely from his own family) to do the cooking. The poisoning process lasts many months if it is to be undetectable, and no one is in a better position to take charge of it than the cook herself. Clearly she knew about the financial arrangement that had been made for the boy, and expected to share in it. At the same time the crosses and circles slashed in the feet were inexplicable. The slow poisoner is patient, careful, methodical; his principal concerns are to keep the dosage effective and to avoid leaving any visible marks. Bravado is unknown to him.

The time came when people no longer told the story of Duncan Marsh. I myself thought of it less often, having no more feasible hypotheses to supply. One evening perhaps five years ago, an American resident here came to me with the news that he had discovered a Moroccan who claimed to have been Marsh's night-watchman. The man's name was Larbi; he was a waiter at Le Fin Bec, a small back-street restaurant. Apparently he spoke poor English, but understood it without difficulty. This information was handed me for what it was worth, said the American, in the event that I felt inclined to make use of it.

I turned it over in my mind, and one night a few weeks later I went down to the restaurant to see Larbi for myself. The place was dimly lit and full of Europeans. I studied the three waiters. They were interchangeable, with wide black mustaches, blue jeans, and sports shirts. A menu was handed me; I could scarcely read it, even directly under the glow of the little table lamp. When the man who had brought it returned, I asked for Larbi.

He pulled the menu from my hand and left the table. A moment later another of the triumvirate came up beside me and handed me the menu he carried under his arm. I ordered in Spanish. When he brought the soup I murmured that I was surprised to find him working there. This brought him up short; I could see him trying to remember me.

"Why wouldn't I be working here?" His voice was level, without inflection.

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"Of course! Why not? It was just that I thought by now you'd have a bazaar or some sort of shop."

His laugh was a snort. "Bazaar!"

When he arrived with the next course, I begged his pardon for meddling in his affairs. But I was interested, I said, because for several years I had been under the impression that he had received a legacy from an English gentleman.

"You mean Señor Marsh?" His eyes were at last wide-open.

"Yes, that was his name. Didn't he give you a letter? He told his friends he had."

He looked over my head as he said, "He gave me a letter."

"Have you ever showed it to anyone?" This was tactless, but sometimes it is better to drive straight at the target.

"Why? What good is it? Señor Marsh is dead." He shook his head with an air of finality, and moved off to another table. By the time I had finished my crème caramel, most of the diners had left, and the place seemed even darker. He came over to the table to see if I wanted coffee. I asked for the check. When he brought it I told him I should like very much to see the letter if he still had it.

"You can come tomorrow night or any night, and I'll show it to you. I have it at home."

I thanked him and promised to return in two or three days. I was confused as I left the restaurant. It seemed clear that the waiter did not consider himself to be incriminated in Duncan Marsh's troubles. When, a few nights later, I saw the document, I no longer understood anything.

It was not a letter; it was a *papier timbré* of the kind on sale at tobacconists. It read, simply: *To Whom It May Concern: I, Duncan Whitelow Marsh, do hereby agree to deposit the sum of One Hundred Pounds to the account of Larbi Lairini, on the first of each month, for as long as I live.*

It was signed and notarized in the presence of two Moroccan witnesses, and bore the date June 11, 1966. As I handed it back to him I said, "And it never did you any good."

He shrugged and slipped the paper into his wallet. "How was it going to? The man died."

"It's too bad."

"*Suerte.*" In the Moroccan usage of the word, it means *fate,* rather than simple luck.

At that moment I could have pressed on, and asked him if he had any idea as to the cause of Marsh's illness, but I wanted time for

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considering what I had just learned. As I rose to leave I said, "I'm sorry it turned out that way. I'll be back in a few days." He held out his hand and I shook it. I had no intentions then. I might return soon or I might never go back.

For as long as I live. The phrase echoed in my mind for several weeks. Possibly Marsh had worded it that way so it would be readily understandable to the *adoul* of Tangier who had affixed their florid signatures to the sheet; yet I could not help interpreting the words in a more melodramatic fashion. To me the document represented the officializing of a covenant already in existence between master and servant: Marsh wanted the watchman's help, and the watchman had agreed to give it. There was nothing upon which to base such an assumption; nevertheless I thought I was on the right track. Slowly I came to believe that if only I could talk to the watchman, in Arabic, and inside the house itself, I might be in a position to see things more clearly.

One evening I walked to Le Fin Bec and without taking a seat motioned to Larbi to step outside for a moment. There I asked him if he could find out whether the house Señor Marsh had lived in was occupied at the moment or not.

"There's nobody living there now." He paused and added, "It's empty. I know the guardian."

I had decided, in spite of my deficient Arabic, to speak to him in his own language, so I said, "Look. I'd like to go with you to the house and see where everything happened. I'll give you fifteen thousand francs for your trouble."

He was startled to hear the Arabic; then his expression shifted to one of satisfaction. "He's not supposed to let anyone in," he said.

I handed him three thousand francs. "You arrange that with him. And fifteen for you when we leave the house. Could we do it Thursday?"

The house had been built, I should say, in the Fifties, when good construction was still possible. It was solidly embedded in the hillside, with the forest towering behind it. We had to climb three flights of stairs through the garden to get to the entrance. The guardian, a squinting Djibli in a brown djellaba, followed close on our footsteps, eyeing me with mistrust.

There was a wide terrace above, with a view to the southeast over the town and the mountains. Behind the terrace a shadowed lawn ended where the forest began. The living room was large and bright, with French doors giving on to the lawn. Odors of damp walls and

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mildew weighted the air. The absurd conviction that I was about to understand everything had taken possession of me; I noticed that I was breathing more quickly. We wandered into the dining room. There was a corridor beyond, and the room where Marsh had slept, shuttered and dark. A wide curving stairway led down to a level where there were two more bedrooms, and continued its spiral to the kitchen and servants' rooms below. The kitchen door opened onto a small flagstoned patio where high philodendron covered the walls.

Larbi looked out and shook his head. "That's the place where all the trouble began," he said glumly.

I pushed through the doorway and sat down on a wrought-iron bench in the sun. "It's damp inside. Why don't we stay out here?"

The guardian left us and locked up the house. Larbi squatted comfortably on his heels near the bench.

There would have been no trouble at all, he said, if only Marsh had been satisfied with Yasmina, the cook whose wages were included in the rent. But she was a careless worker and the food was bad. He asked Larbi to find him another cook.

"I told him ahead of time that this woman Meriam had a little girl, and some days she could leave her with friends and some days she would have to bring her with her when she came to work. He said it didn't matter, but he wanted her to be quiet."

The woman was hired. Two or three days a week she came accompanied by the child, who would play in the patio, where she could watch her. From the beginning Marsh complained that she was noisy. Repeatedly he sent messages down to Meriam, asking her to make the child be still. And one day he went quietly around the outside of the house and down to the patio. He got on all fours, put his face close to the little girl's face, and frowned at her so fiercely that she began to scream. When Meriam rushed out of the kitchen he stood up smiling and walked off. The little girl continued to scream and wail in a corner of the kitchen, until Meriam took her home. That night, still sobbing, she came down with a high fever. For several weeks she hovered between life and death, and when she was finally out of danger she could no longer walk.

Meriam, who was earning relatively high wages, consulted one fqih after another. They agreed that "the eye" had been put on the child; it was equally clear that the Nazarene for whom she worked had done it. What they told her she must do, Larbi explained, was to administer certain substances to Marsh which eventually would

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make it possible to counteract the spell. This was absolutely necessary, he said, staring at me gravely. Even if the señor had agreed to remove it (and of course she never would have mentioned it to him) he would not have been able to. What she gave him could not harm him; it was merely medicine to relax him so that when the time came to undo the spell he would not make any objections.

At some point Marsh confided to Larbi that he suspected Meriam of slipping soporifics into his food, and begged him to be vigilant. The provision for Larbi's well-being was signed as an inducement to enlisting his active support. Since to Larbi the mixtures Meriam was feeding her master were relatively harmless, he reassured him and let her continue to dose him with her concoctions.

Tired of squatting, Larbi suddenly stood up and began to walk back and forth, stepping carefully in the center of each flagstone. "When he had to go to the hospital in London, I told her, 'Now you've made him sick. Suppose he doesn't come back? You'll never break it.' She was worried about it. 'I've done what I could,' she said. 'It's in the hands of Allah.' "

When Marsh did return to Tangier, Larbi urged her to be quick about bringing things to a head, now that she had been fortunate enough to get him back. He was thinking, he said, that it might be better for the señor's health if her treatment were not continued for too long a time.

I asked no questions while he talked; I made a point of keeping my face entirely expressionless, thinking that if he noticed the least flicker of disapproval he might stop. The sun had gone behind the trees and the patio was chilly. I had a strong desire to get up and walk back and forth as he was doing, but I thought even that might interrupt him. Once stopped, the flow might not resume.

Soon Marsh was worse than ever, with racking pains in his abdomen and kidneys. He remained in bed then, and Larbi brought him his food. When Meriam saw that he was no longer able to leave the bed, even to go into the bathroom, she decided that the time had come to get rid of the spell. On the same night that a fqih held a ceremony at her house in the presence of the crippled child, four men from Meriam's family came up to Djamaa el Mokra.

"When I saw them coming, I got onto my motorcycle and went into the city. I didn't want to be here when they did it. It had nothing to do with me." He stood still and rubbed his hands together. I heard the southwest wind beginning to sound in the trees; it was that time of afternoon. "Come. I'll show you something," he said.

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We climbed steps around the back of the house and came out onto a terrace with a pergola over it. Beyond this lay the lawn and the wall of trees.

"He was very sick for the next two days. He kept asking me to telephone the English doctor."

"Didn't you do it?"

Larbi stopped walking and looked at me. "I had to clean everything up first. Meriam wouldn't touch him. It was during the rains. He had mud and blood all over him when I got back here and found him. The next day I gave him a bath and changed the sheets and blankets. And I cleaned the house, because they got mud everywhere when they brought him back in. Come on. You'll see where they had to take him."

We had crossed the lawn and were walking in the long grass that skirted the edge of the woods. A path led off to the right through the tangle of undergrowth, and we followed it, climbing across boulders and fallen tree trunks until we came to an old stone well. I leaned over the wall of rocks around it and saw the small circle of sky far below.

"They had to drag him all the way here, you see, and hold him steady right over the well while they made the signs on his feet, so the blood would fall into the water. It's no good if it falls on the side of the well. And they had to make the same signs the fqih drew on paper for the little girl. That's hard to do in the dark and in the rain. But they did it. I saw the cuts when I bathed him."

Cautiously I asked him if he saw any connection between all this and Marsh's death. He ceased staring into the well and turned around. We started to walk back toward the house.

"He died because his hour had come."

And had the spell been broken? I asked him. Could the child walk afterward? But he had never heard, for Meriam had gone to Kenitra not much later to live with her sister.

When we were in the car, driving back down to the city, I handed him the money. He stared at it for several seconds before slipping it into his pocket.

I let him off in town with a vague sense of disappointment, and I saw that I had not only expected, but actually hoped, to find someone on whom the guilt might be fixed. What constitutes a crime? There was no criminal intent—only a mother moving in the darkness of ancient ignorance. I thought about it on my way home in the taxi.

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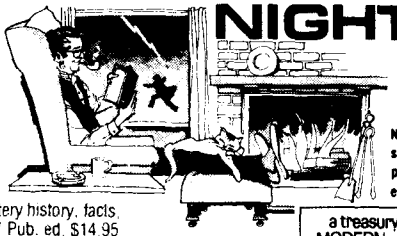

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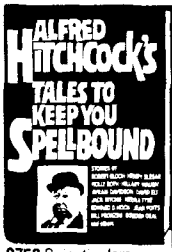

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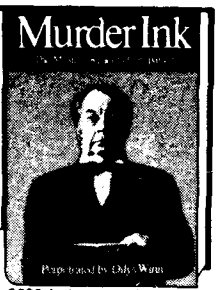

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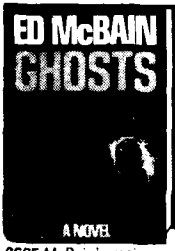

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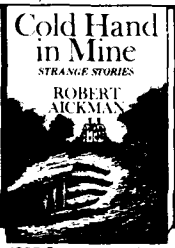

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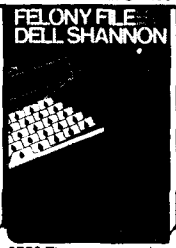

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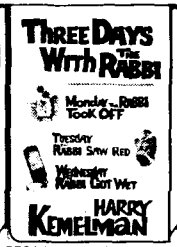

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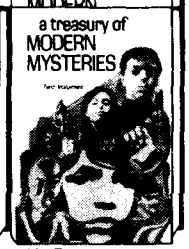

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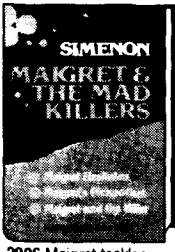

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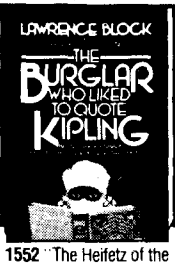

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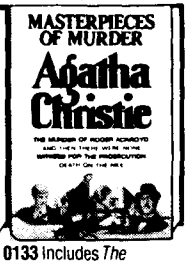

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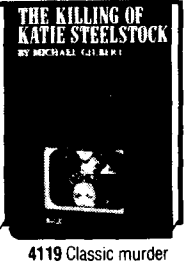

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ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY NEWSLETTER

CRIME BEAT

by R. E. PORTER

JUVENILE MYSTERIES: This year I've had the pleasure of serving on a committee judging juvenile mysteries for a national award, and the experience has given me new insight into the wide variety of books available to young people. With Christmas approaching here are some gift suggestions for the budding mystery fan.

For quite young readers there's an excellent 1979 title, *The Mystery of the Lost and Found Hound* by Lynn Hall (Garrard Publishing). It involves a gang of dog thieves and has a neat clue that would do justice to many adult mysteries. Another book for younger readers is Carol Russell Law's *The Case of the Weird Street Firebug* (Knopf, $1.95). Carol Law has long been active in the Southern California chapter of Mystery Writers of America, and we noticed some familiar mystery names among the minor characters in this one.

A good boys' book in the 8-12 age group is *More Minden Curses* by Willo Davis Roberts (Atheneum, $8.95). And for girls 10-14 there's *Cora Ravenwing* by Gina Wilson (Atheneum, $8.95). The crime element here is slight, but its mood of brooding menace in a small English village, centered on two schoolgirls, is memorable. The well-known British writer Catherine Cookson has a new juvenile novel, *Mrs. Flannagan's Trumpet* (Lothrop, $7.95), set on the east coast of England in 1890 and dealing with a 16-year-old boy trying to rescue his sister from a band of white slavers. (Today's juvenile novels can and do cover every imaginable subject!)

For teenage readers, two-time Edgar winner Jay Bennett has a new thriller, *The Pigeon* (Methuen, $8.95), about a young man framed for the murder of his Greenwich Village girl friend. Robert Cormier's latest novel, *After the First Death,* published last year as a juvenile, has appeared in an adult paperback edition (Avon, $2.25). It's a suspenseful, downbeat tale of terrorists who hijack a bus full of children, and is a good bridge between juvenile and adult fiction for the mature teenager.

COURT OF LAST RESORT: Most readers are aware that the late Erle Stanley Gardner founded a non-profit service, The Court of Last Resort, to investigate and publicize the cases of innocent people unjustly con-

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victed of major crimes. Starting in 1948, the team Gardner assembled was instrumental in clearing a number of wrongly convicted men, and the Court's activities were regularly reported in the pages of *Argosy* magazine.

Now The Court of Last Resort has been revived by Darrell D. Bross, who has assembled a team of 75 investigators, most of them with professional backgrounds and many of them members of Mensa, the high I.Q. society. Operating out of its headquarters at 254 Winding Way, San Francisco, CA 94112, the Court is presently reviewing the cases of several persons serving life sentences in prisons around the country.

MYSTERY COLLECTORS: An unusual book of special interest to mystery collectors is Kevin B. Hancer's *The Paperback Price Guide* (Harmony Books/Crown, $9.95). Its 430 pages attempt to list all paperback books published in America between 1939 and 1959. The collectors' prices assigned to some titles seem a bit arbitrary, but the real value of the book lies in the lists themselves, arranged alphabetically by imprint or publisher, and then numerically for each imprint. Included are not only the publishing giants of the period like Bantam, Dell, Pocket, and Signet, but also the digest-size mystery series brought out under the all-but-forgotten imprints of Best-seller, Bleak House, Black Knight, Bonded, Green Dragon, Jonathan Press, Mercury Mystery, Murder Mystery Monthly, Mystery Novel Classic, and scores of others. The Guide includes several hundred cover illustrations, 72 in full color.

COMING ATTRACTIONS: In January, Lawrence Block's award-winning Burglar series continues with *The Burglar Who Studied Spinoza* from Random House. In the same month Frederick Ungar publishes two more volumes in its continuing series on mystery writers: *Raymond Chandler* by Jerry Speir and *Dorothy L. Sayers* by Dawson Gaillard.

Best-selling writer Robin Cook, author of *Coma* and *Sphinx,* returns to the medical mystery with *Brain,* due from Putnam in February. And Dick Francis's latest racing thriller, *Reflex,* already published in England, should be appearing here about the same time, also from Putnam.

Harlan Ellison was publishing crime stories (in *The Saint Magazine* and elsewhere) even before he became a controversial and highly regarded writer of science fiction and fantasy. His blending of fantasy and crime won him an MWA Edgar Award in 1973, and now he's returning to the crime field with a major new novel, *Shrikes,* on which he is currently working. The story concerns five women who plan to kill their husbands, and Houghton Mifflin will publish it—though possibly not till 1982.

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"Q"

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BLOODY VISIONS

by CHRIS STEINBRUNNER

"Hopscotch is a children's game in which you jump from one space to another, trying to pick up an elusive object. If you make a false step, you're apt to fall on your rear end. That somehow seems appropriate to espionage." So explains Brian Garfield, who has just moved to square one by transferring his Edgar-winning spy novel, *Hopscotch*, into a lighthearted, unorthodox comedy thriller, one in which a middle-aged hero—very reminiscent of the Charlie Dark character in the stories Brian writes for *EQMM*—not only knows too much but is targeted because he is suddenly willing to tell it all.

Miles Kendig is the maverick CIA chief, a man with thirty years in the field, now the complacent head of the Munich station. He is played to basset-faced perfection by Walter Matthau, bemoaning how far espionage has come from the days when "you knew where you stood: the bad guys wore mustaches," and the drab, colorless little double agents with whom he has to consort. During the frenzied revelry of Munich's Oktoberfest, Kendig dismantles a Soviet spy ring passing microfilm, but does not sweep his Russian KGB chief opposite number (Herbert Lom) into his net. Why bother? It would only mean spending six months trying to discover the identity of the agent with whom the Russians would replace Lom, and a further six months trying to learn his habits. Better to leave Lom where he is.

But Kendig's ambitious CIA boss, the apoplectic G. P. Myerson (Ned Beatty), thinks otherwise, and demotes Kendig from the field to a filing-station post, not realizing he has infuriated a top operative with three decades of international intrigue behind him. Kendig walks out of his job (after carefully shredding his own file) and, under a variety of identities, hopscotching from his pursuers across colorful international locales, begins writing a book exposing the innermost secrets of the CIA and other spy networks, sending the work chapter by chapter to the governments involved (as well as to an eager publisher). This coltish behavior causes consternation: soon Kendig is a marked man.

But no matter, our turncoat is having too much fun, leapfrogging from Salzburg to London to Savannah to Bermuda, commandeering biplanes and stealing police cars, and on the way picking up an old flame, an ex-Mata Hari who left the CIA to marry money but is now a chic, sharp widow ready for adventures (the incomparably cool Glenda Jackson). Whistling Mozart to relax, he is maddeningly just out of reach of his hot-on-the-trail trackers, Myerson and a young operative Kendig himself has trained (Sam Waterston)—and those two are serious. "Get him—dead or alive," Myerson barks. We are reminded of something the KGB's Lom has said: "The human species has lived on this planet for millions of years, and except for just a tiny frac-

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tion of that time we have been hunters."

The hunt is for fun here, however, and as the film skips gleefully from place to glamorous place it misses some of the harder edges of the Garfield novel. As well, Kendig's action in revealing his country's secrets seems (to me) as morally reprehensible as Charles Bronson in the film version of Garfield's *Death Wish*. But the froth and fluff of *Hopscotch*'s sheer leaps, Matthau's crusty maneuvers, and Jackson's stylish, white-gloved assist (as in *House Calls*, they spark together), make this game worth playing.

Espionage is also at the core of *Miss Fury*'s games, and this legendary adventuress—heroine of the first newspaper strip with a female central character to be conceived, written, and drawn by a woman (Tarpe Mills, back in 1941) has just appeared in book form, published by Archival Press, Inc. It is interesting to step back into that pre-war time, where spy activity seems indeed to be a good deal harsher than in *Hopscotch*, a critical period where the villains were well aware that "one slight mishap is often sufficient to change the entire attitude of a nation." Trying to block those calculated mishaps is society woman Marla Drake, costumed as a black-leopard night creature. The dramas are crude, but Miss Fury herself is disturbingly seductive (far more than such other caped heroines of the Forties as Lady Luck and Black Angel) against an array of villains, male and female, who are singularly mean-spirited and cunning. Swinging through this just-before-the-war mix of spies, boudoirs, and bombs, sleek *Miss Fury* is welcome pop art from the past.

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INTERVIEW: ROBERT TWOHY (1)

This is the first part of an interview that will be concluded in the next issue.

EQMN: Your "Never Anything But Trouble" was an auspicious "first" in the June 1957 issue of *EQMM*. Your stories have a unique flavor and reflect a lack of interest in pretentious living, for one thing. Is this a fair inference, and, if so, has this always been true for you?

TWOHY: Yes. I have limited drives in the direction of prestige. It takes an effort I'm not ready to come up with—stylish possessions need attention and upkeep. The social ramble can be hard on the nerves. I prefer keeping things easy to manage, and live with.

EQMN: Do you write full time?

TWOHY: I've not held any other job for about five years. Which of course has given me a lot more time for writing. But there are some dangers there—I can get out of touch with what's happening. I think it was Mao who had the idea that all bureaucrats should spend a week of

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every year at hard labor with the peasants, to refresh their social awareness. I think he didn't include himself. Or maybe it wasn't Mao. But the point is worth thinking about—so I'm thinking about it.

EQMN: What about past jobs? You've written so convincingly of prizefighters, cab drivers, and drifters—have you done any of those things?

TWOHY: I drove a cab for ten years. Cab driving is a fine job for seeing things from a basic level. I was never a prizefighter, but know a few, and admire them as people who dare put their dream on the line, at risk of pain, injury, and death. I've never been a drifter, but know some. They're dreamers too, searching for something—maybe a place they can fit in and not feel so alone. They probably won't find it, and if they do, like Dorothy they may have an instant urge to get back to Kansas. So they can start all over. The fun's in the quest, not the discovery.

EQMN: Do you write short fiction exclusively?

TWOHY: I've written some novels, but along the way they unravel usually. I've written comedy musical plays which have been put on in little theater in Southern California and locally [Northern California]. Recently I collaborated with a friend on a movie script, which is now out in the world. I like short fiction best—I was raised on it; the first adult fiction I read was "Red-Headed League." It seemed to me a perfect creation, and still does. I've tried to write something to approach it, and haven't yet—but the fun is in the quest.

EQMN: You've written some pungent and very funny tales about Hollywood—"Hooray for Hollywood" and "Bottomed Out," for example—and you've said the mole on Ann's lip in "Tomorrow We Finish Ann" (in the November 3, 1980 *EQMM*) was inspired by "the light of [your] life in years gone by," Alice Faye. Have you any personal experience of Hollywood?

TWOHY: I was a mute worshipper of Alice at the neighborhood palace of dreams, but never knew her personally. My former wife was a Hollywood resident and I visited the town frequently. Her stepfather was a fine character actor who wasn't a household name, but every moviegoing household knew the features of Charles Halton. Through his shoptalk I got the idea that there was nothing special or mysterious about the big names of Hollywood, so in my stories I tend to treat them lightheartedly, and with some affection—as I would treat Charlie. I like Hollywood, in theory anyway. It's a place that attracts dreamers, who, as you may have noticed, I have warm feelings for.

EQMN: Are you a movie fan?

TWOHY: Not really. But I think fine old movies are great for a writer to look at and ponder over. They're basic story technique, which applies to any fiction: quick and sure characterization, hang out a story line, stay tight to it, and keep out of the way. Those movies packed in the fans because the writers knew how to grab, entertain, excite—and how to keep things moving. I've learned from them and know I can learn a lot more.

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THE JURY BOX

by JON L. BREEN

The practice of offering fictional solutions to real-life crimes dates back at least as far as Poe's "The Mystery of Marie Roget." With the current (and not entirely salutary) popularity of "faction," there are probably more efforts in this line than ever before. Below are four recent examples, two of which follow the sometimes successful ploy of bringing Sherlock Holmes into the act.

**** Julian Symons: *Sweet Adelaide,* Harper and Row, $9.95. Symons's case history of a celebrated Victorian crime, the chloroform poisoning of Edwin Bartlett, is an excellent one. Though most of his books have had contemporary settings, the author is one of the very best at evoking a past time through the use of judiciously chosen period details. Symons brings the accused, Adelaide Bartlett, and the other characters to life with his usual skill and offers a credible theory about the case's central mystery. In a postscript, he reveals exactly how much of the story is established fact and how much fictional speculation, a policy some other writers would do well to follow.

*** Richard Gordon: *Jack the Ripper,* Atheneum, $9.95. There have been so many Ripper books lately, fiction and non-fiction, that even the keenest buffs may heave a sigh at the prospect of another. Fortunately, Gordon has more to offer than the usual reprise of the Whitechapel killer's crimes: a reekingly vivid portrait of the medical and social scene in 1888 London. There are several potential Rippers among the kinky Whitechapel doctors in the cast, and the usual suspects—Leather Apron, Dr. Gull, the Duke of Clarence, J. K. Stephen, M. J. Druitt—either appear or are referred to. The solution is disappointingly pat, with Freudian interpretations provided by Freud himself, but the style and background make the trip worthwhile. (Note for the squeamish: This book contains the most graphic descriptions of the Ripper's crimes I have ever read.)

*** Michael Hardwick: *Prisoner of the Devil,* Proteus, $9.95. The co-author of several Sherlockian plays and reference books presents the untold story of Holmes's involvement in the Dreyfus case, highlighted by two daring assaults on Devil's Island. In its duplication of the Doyle style and its depictions of Holmes, Watson, and brother Mycroft, this is one of the best book-length pastiches.

** Edmund Aubrey: *Sherlock Holmes in Dallas,* Dodd, Mead, $9.95. Unlike Hardwick's book, this is not a genuine novel but rather an extended discussion of the mysteries of the John F. Kennedy assassination presented in the form of Holmes-Watson dialogue. To give the illusion of fiction, Aubrey moves the pair among the exhibits and from city to city like Victorian ghosts, with no third character emerging in a major role. Though the author is probably wise to eschew far-fetched melodrama in favor of sticking to existing evidence, the resultant exercise offers no really

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new theory, merely another call to reopen the case.

**** H. R. F. Keating: *The Murder of the Maharajah,* Doubleday, $10.00. Set in 1930 India and involving the death of a hated maharajah, surrounded by suitably motivated suspects, Keating's salute to the Golden Age of Detection observes all the conventions of the classical puzzle while offering more style, wit, pace, and observation of character and background than most of them. The final surprise twist (unrelated to the central mystery) is such a nice one, it's a pity some reviewers have chosen to tip it in their notices.

*** Robert Barnard: *Death of a Literary Widow,* Scribners, $8.95. The most memorable character (or caricature) in this satirical mystery is one of the most venomously drawn comic Americans to appear even in British detective fiction, a professor of English named Dwight Kronweiser, who is determined to resuscitate the reputation of British working-class novelist Walter Machin. Kronweiser may be a trifle overdone, but the quotation from his critical prose is a priceless parody of the worst academic literary analysis. In sum, this is Barnard's usual amusing job, with an ending that satisfies without surprising too much.

*** Michael Z. Lewin: *Outside In,* Knopf, $8.95. Willie Werth, an Indianapolis mystery writer struggling to finish his latest book about hard-boiled detective Hank Midwinter, becomes interested in a real-life slaying. Willie's fictional efforts, interspersed with his own attempts at sleuthing, are just good enough (and bad enough) to be believed, and his creative ups and downs are very credibly depicted. Though strong on style and character drawing, this is basically an anti-detective story, and unprepared readers may find the solution disappointing.

I wonder how many devoted fans of John Dickson Carr will be as surprised as I was that his first series detective, Henri Bencolin, appeared in several published short stories prior to *It Walks by Night* (1930), the first Carr novel. Four such tales, from the college literary magazine *The Haverfordian* in the years 1926–28, appear in the new collection *The Door to Doom and Other Detections* (Harper and Row, $12.95), edited and introduced by Douglas G Greene. The volume also includes three other not-previously-reprinted short stories, plus the title story, six radio plays, two Sherlockian parodies, and two essays, all of which have appeared in *EQMM.* Though the stories do not rank with Carr's best works, they are unmistakable in their wonderfully evocative style and their devotion to the e elucidation of impossible crimes. The excellent Carr bibliography by editor Greene helps make this an important mystery volume.

Meanwhile, some of Carr's best novels are appearing in new paperback editions, most recently *He Who Whispers* (Ace/Charter, $1.95), a 1946 chiller starring Dr. Gideon Fell and opening with an impossible-to-refuse invitation to a dinner of the Murder Club.

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DEPARTMENT OF "FIRST STORIES"

This is the 566th "first story" to be published by Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine . . . What rhymes with crimes? . . .

The author, Thelma C. Sokoloff, was graduated from the University of Missouri School of Journalism. She has been an advertising copywriter and a newspaper reporter. She and her husband have traveled extensively—"through every continent (except Antarctica)." Mrs. Sokoloff's hobbies "include gourmet cooking, collecting tribal arts from places like New Guinea and East Africa, and keeping tabs on three daughters in their early twenties." She believes "that classical music, beautiful plants, and chocolate mousse are musts for life and happiness" . . .

PROVIDENCE WILL PROVIDE

by THELMA C. SOKOLOFF

Everybody at Morgantown High School knew about Jessie Widmark's retirement plans. One of these days she was going to pack up her art books and her paint brushes, take her tiny pension, and live out her days comfortably in Cuernavaca. At least, that's what Jessie and the other faculty members thought until word came down from the mayor's office about the budget cutback of all teachers without tenure.

At first it didn't seem so bad. It was the young ones who'd be fired, and everybody said they'd probably get better jobs anyway. But then suddenly someone remembered Jessie—six months away from retirement and never tenured. Now there'd be no pension.

The principal, Dr. Stevens, called her in and broke the news. "I feel as bad as you do, Jessie, but there's nothing I can do. You know we couldn't give you tenure because you only went to teacher's training school. I always hoped you'd go back to college and get your degree."

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"I surely meant to," Jessie said, "but there was always Mother to take care of, and the years just slipped away from me. Then too, it was perfectly acceptable way back when I started teaching." Jessie stifled a small cough that was all that stood between her and tears. "Anyway, I didn't need tenure to get my pension—just had to work out my thirty years." Her voice trailed off. "Whoever thought I could be fired just months before retirement?"

"I've appealed to Mayor Billings, Jessie, but the mayor says he just can't make any exception."

"Jack Billings has a mighty short memory." Jessie's steady glance caught Dr. Stevens unaware. "I guess Jack's forgotten the year I passed him in everything even though his grades were failing. I knew his father was dying and I felt sorry for the boy."

Dr. Stevens rearranged the objects on his already neatly arranged desk. "Jessie, you're caught in a box of bureaucracy that's all tied up with red tape. It's not much consolation, but we'll be having a big retirement party for you. That's the least we can do."

Jessie Widmark's dismissal hung like a pall over Morgantown High School. In a school filled with dull books and dreary staff members, Jessie's slightly offbeat personality was a joy. Everybody loved the small trim figure that scurried through the halls dressed from head to toe in one bright color. The sight of Jessie arriving on her motorscooter in the mornings was a high spot of the day, and an invitation to Jessie's apartment for a home-cooked meal of Tibetan delicacies was highly sought after.

One of Jessie's many contributions to the school was her little mottoes or "Jessieisms," as they came to be called. She had survived what she thought of as a healthy and productive life and felt it was her duty as a teacher to pass along bits of learning that she hoped would be helpful. Every day Jessie would write a little rhyme on the blackboard: *Start each day the hot-breakfast way; Stay close to a friend, don't borrow or lend;* or *Save a penny, soon you'll have many.*

As the years passed and Jessie began to look on herself as the elder stateswoman of Morgantown High School, she branched out with her little mottoes. Frequently she'd post a notice in the lunchroom to advise: *After you eat, keep our lunchroom neat* or *Protein in your diet? You really ought to try it.*

The students would giggle as each new Jessieism appeared and when they'd tell their parents, there'd be knowing smiles from the older generation who remembered the monochromatic outfits and

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the motorscooter as well as the slogans when they were in her class.

Jessie worked out her last weeks on the job, presenting a brave but worried face to students and faculty. "But with no pension, what'll happen to your retirement plans?" Dorothy Abbott of Sociology asked one day at lunch. "*There'll be a change in the tide, and Providence will provide*," Jessie answered with one of her own mottoes. "Providence will provide."

The faculty and staff of Morgantown High went all out in giving Jessie the banquet they'd promised. Irene LaFitte's catering service was called in and the gymnasium was done up in pink and green crepe paper, with baskets of pink glads banked around the dais. Everybody made speeches and Jessie was presented with a gold watch and a lifetime subscription to the *National Geographic*. Of course, as Dorothy Abbott pointed out, at Jessie's age a lifetime subscription wasn't going to bankrupt the Board of Education.

The thing about the affair that made Jessie most happy was the return of so many old students—some of them she hadn't seen in years. There was Melanie Potts, pushing 30 and still painting those dreary still lifes. There was Jimmy Coughlin who'd given up dreams of being a painter to take over his father's cannery. And there was Danny Dumont, always her favorite. Poor Danny, his golden fingers had ended up repairing TV sets instead of creating the beautiful sculptures Jessie had expected from him.

It was Danny who helped Jessie home with her gifts and packages and all the way he was silent. Finally, as they stacked the last box on Jessie's kitchen table he spoke. "You know, Miss Widmark, I've always remembered what you taught us—*Be honest and aboveboard, and you'll reap the reward*. Only problem is it's just not working for me. I'm the most honest guy around and my TV business is going nowhere."

"I'm sorry things aren't working out for you, Danny. Truly sorry. We'll have to get together and have a long chat soon."

After Danny left and she'd put her gifts away, Jessie poured herself a cup of tea.

She was already beginning to feel the loneliness she feared. It wasn't going to be easy, and Jessie knew it.

For the next few weeks she busied herself with errands and projects, but as the cold winter drew on and she sat alone in the small apartment, a bitter resentment began to creep into her chilled bones. The bright sun was drenching Cuernavaca with its warmth this very day; the bougainvillea was casting lovely shadows around the

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tiny cottage Jessie had chosen for her retirement. She had been treated shabbily and she knew it.

As Jessie thumbed through the evening paper, an item caught her eye. "Crime Wave Hits Morgantown; Mayor Billings Cautions Citizens." From the back of her mind a bit of buried trivia bubbled to the surface of Jessie's thoughts. Perhaps she could help the mayor with his problem—help him in his job as he had helped her. When she walked into the kitchen to prepare another lonely meal, she looked up Danny Dumont's number in the phone book. She'd have to call him in the morning to come over for that chat.

It was two days later when Jessie Widmark pulled her purple cloth coat up around her neck, straightened her small purple flowerpot hat, and knocked on the door of Mayor Jack Billings' office. "Why, Miss Jessie," Jack faltered. "I've been meaning to come around and talk to you. Mighty sorry about what happened with your job—dirty shame it was. I sure wish I could have done something to help, but we just had to lay off as many—"

"It's over and done now, Jack," Jessie interrupted, "over and done. I came here about that item I read in the paper. All those burglaries and things—looks mighty bad for you as mayor, Jack."

"Well, I'm not happy about it, Miss Jessie. What do you have in mind? You're not planning on playing Nancy Drew at your age, I hope." Jack Billings cast a condescending little smile at Jessie.

She spoke slowly and thoughtfully. "I need something to keep me busy, Jack. As you know, I didn't *plan* to retire just yet, but that's another story. I've been thinking how everybody in town knows about my little mottoes and everybody knows I'm an artist—perhaps I can combine my talents, keep myself busy, and be helpful to the town too."

"I'm sure glad to see you're not bitter about losing your job. What do you have in mind, Jessie?"

"I'd like to make up a series of little signs to help with this crime campaign. You know—*A lock on your door makes burglaries a chore.* That sort of thing. I'd paint them myself and place them around town. There'd be no charge for my work and you'd be keeping an old lady out of mischief."

"Sounds like the town has nothing to lose," Mayor Billings said. "Go to it, Miss Jessie."

In the next few months Jessie Widmark's familiar figure was seen frequently darting about town placing the signs in strategic places. On the park lawn were the words: *Walk with a friend, and muggings*

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will end. In front of City Hall residents were advised: *Help a child stay alive, slow down when you drive.* On every bus in town Jessie posted warnings: *Give your wallet a thought, and help a pickpocket get caught.*

Several small notices appeared in the *Daily Bugle* informing readers of Jessie Widmark's ambitious little project. Eventually an editorial commended her on the unique service she was rendering. Unfortunately, however, the notice pointed out, the outbreak of small crimes persisted. If anything, the wave seemed to be reaching epidemic proportions.

And then as summer came to an end, a moving van was seen taking away Jessie's few possessions, all packed up for shipping. The next day she headed for the airport where she noted the headline on the newspaper stand: "Mayor Billings Resigns in Furor Over Crime Wave." Jessie Widmark smiled as she boarded the plane for Cuernavaca.

The sun around the bougainvillea-shaded cottage was as warm as Jessie imagined it would be. A few miles down the road in a stucco-walled studio, Danny Dumont was working on a sculpture that Jessie thought had great potential. Frequently, when he'd drop by in the evening for a cold glass of tea and a dinner of Tibetan delights, Danny and Jessie would talk happily about their triumph.

"It was your little signs that really did it, Miss Widmark. What a stroke of genius that you remembered about people checking to see if their wallets were safe whenever they heard or read about pickpockets."

"Yes, Danny, but you had the golden fingers. You knew just how to lift the wallets without anybody being the wiser. I always knew you were wasting your time working on those TV sets."

"Why, it was a cinch." Danny smiled shyly. "Even for an inexperienced dip like me. Every time they'd look at your pickpocket sign on a crosstown bus, their hands would fly up to just where the wallet was resting. I never had to fumble—just go directly to the target. It's like you used to tell our class: *Life can be sunny if you don't lack for money.*"

"That's right, Danny." Jessie looked happily around the pleasant room. "And let's not forget: *All worries are past for the one who laughs last.*"

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DEPARTMENT OF "FIRST STORIES"

This is the 567th "first story" to be published by Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine . . . remembrances of events past . . .

The author, Carol Boyd-Hall, is in her thirties and has a teenage son, and "many times we get into rapping and listening to his rock records." Mrs. Boyd-Hall's previous publications have been "only in college magazines." She was staff reporter for Muskegon Community College's student newspaper, and two of her story appearances in college "evolved from several months of working for a traveling carnival." Her hobbies include "walking, especially in the snow or mild wind," and she is "hopelessly addicted to several soap operas, and playing spades and euchre" . . .

THE PICTURES COME AND GO

by CAROL BOYD-HALL

The gawkers come and stare. They see the gutted buildings, the black, burned beams, the gaping holes where two days ago there were roofs. They see the cleanup crew already at work, the crane hammering away at the still smoldering ruins, the firemen still pouring water on the last building.

I too gawk. I see the shattered glass on the sidewalk, the ropes strung up to keep the sightseers from getting too close, to avoid injury, to avoid hampering the men at work.

I watch the gawkers strain at the ropes, trying to get as close as they can. I feel the excitement they feel, see their glazed look. I listen to what they say.

"The worst fire in our history." "A six-alarm fire." "It started in the basement." "He put a penny in the fuse box." "When did it start?" "The firemen are inefficient." "These firemen really did a

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good job." "Three people were killed." "Four firemen overcome by smoke." "Wish I had color film in my camera."

A half block of downtown burned away. Gone up in smoke and flames.

I was there when the first fire truck arrived. At first they didn't see the fire, just the smoke billowing from the empty hotel.

The hotel. When I was a boy, the hotel was a showplace. I know, there were finer ones built in the country. But this town is a farming community.

I remember sneaking into the hotel when I was nine. Cyrus, my cousin, was eleven, and he lived with my Ma and me. My Pa was dead and my Ma worked in the hotel. She was a maid. She didn't make enough to barely keep food on the table. She washed windows and pushed a mop. She dusted. She changed linens. She worked her head off and wore her feet out trying to earn our keep.

I loved my Ma a lot. She insisted we stay in school. Cyrus and I wanted to find some type of work, anything. Ma said when we turned twelve.

Well, Ma said we were never ever to go to the hotel. I figured she didn't want us to see her working so hard. Cyrus said she was ashamed of the clothes we wore, it being a fancy hotel and big shots coming in there. Well, we were both wrong . . .

It was hot, I mean the day was a scorcher. The sun was like a giant torch in the sky. Cyrus and I sat in our stifling apartment watching a roach scurrying about. Ma kept the apartment clean, really clean, but the building was full of roaches and there was nothing we could do about them.

We only had three rooms. Ma let Cyrus and me have the bedroom and we slept on a big bed that sagged in the middle. Ma slept on a cot in the living room. The kitchen was small and we shared a bath.

At first Cyrus and me—well, we thought everyone lived like this and everyone had cockroaches. But during the long hot summer days we explored our town and saw some mighty big and fancy houses.

Anyhow, Cyrus said to me that morning, "Let's sneak over to the hotel today and see what it looks like inside."

"No," I answered. "Ma wouldn't like it."

"Come on, don't be a scaredy."

No one called me a scaredy. I wasn't afraid of anything. So I said, "Aw, all right."

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We sauntered through town, past the bank we knew we'd own some day. Past the drugstore with its rows of bottles which contained mysterious fluids and potions. We stopped at the food market and when Baldy wasn't looking we each grabbed an apple and ran like hell.

We ran down the alley behind the hotel, plunked down on the ground, and munched on our apples. Cyrus ate the core, seeds and all. Not to be outdone, I ate mine, too. I didn't much like it.

We jumped up quickly and scurried around the block to the front of the huge Clinton Hotel. It had the biggest front window in town. We gazed through it. The lobby was full of overstuffed sofas and chairs. The floor was covered with a beige carpet. A large radio stood in the middle of the room.

"Cyrus, how are we gonna get in? The desk clerk is standing right there. He can see everybody coming and going."

"Willy, *don't be so dumb.* He's gonna have to take a leak sooner or later."

We gaped through the window only a few minutes. A distinguished-looking man sat down, chomping on a big cigar. Except for him and the desk clerk the lobby was empty.

The desk clerk, a dumpy little man with sad eyes and a bushy mustache, walked from behind the desk over to the man with the cigar. They talked a minute. Then the desk clerk walked out of the lobby.

"Come on, Willy, let's go."

My heart felt racy and my knees were knocking, but I followed Cyrus. He pushed open the door and strutted in like we owned the building.

We dug our toes into that thick carpet. We looked at the fancy lamps and listened to music coming from the radio. We didn't have anything like that at home. We sat down on one of the sofas. It was so soft. We started to bounce up and down. The man with the cigar coughed and glared at us. We shot him a grin and ran to the elevator. Neither of us had ever ridden in one before.

The door was open and a colored lady was sitting inside on a stool. We didn't see many colored people in our town. I stared. Cyrus punched me. "Come on," he ordered and he sauntered into the elevator.

I followed.

"Floor, please."

"Five," Cyrus said.

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She pulled the door shut, then the screen, pushed a button, and up we went. I enjoyed the sensation as the elevator climbed, creaking, upward.

Suddenly it lurched to a stop. I thought my stomach wasn't going to. The colored lady pulled the gate and door, and we stepped out on the fifth floor. This was the tallest building in our city. We strolled into the hallway. There was nothing to see, no windows, just locked doors. "Aw, this ain't nuthin'," I moaned.

We ran down the stairs. On the third floor I heard my Ma and a man yelling. We stopped and crept down the hallway, listening at door 310 like two old-maid gossips.

"Arthur, I am not going to be able to hide it much longer. You have to help me." My Ma was pleading.

"Hazel, I told you that it was your responsibility. You were willing enough."

"Yes, because I wanted to keep my job." Her voice, so golden, but tired, was cracking. "You threatened my job if I didn't. Arthur, I have two kids to support. My husband is dead. Dead, Arthur! I have to support Willy and Cyrus." Ma was crying now. As we crept down the stairs we could hear Arthur yelling, "Don't start with the tears. They just make me mad!"

Cyrus and I ran out of the hotel, wondering and talking about what was wrong. What couldn't Ma hide? What did she have to do besides washing floors and changing beds? What was going on? Arthur owned the hotel. What did he know that we didn't? Had Ma killed Pa and was Arthur blackmailing Ma, keeping her working for next to nothing? No, I knew Ma wouldn't kill Pa. What if it was an accident though? But what couldn't she hide? The question haunted us.

We lay on the grass by the creek. We stripped and waded in the water, but we just couldn't have any fun. Finally we headed back to our dingy, stuffy apartment where Ma was standing over the gas stove, sweat running down her face. Her eyes were red-rimmed, but she wouldn't say a word and we couldn't ask.

Ma still kept working every day. But the floors at our house didn't shine any more. Her feet were puffy and swollen as well as her hands and stomach. Her face grew paler every day. I thought she was getting fat and lazy. But her white face grew thinner and bonier.

Once I heard her crying in the night. I slipped out of bed and padded to the living room. She must have heard me. I could barely see, but in the darkness I could faintly see her brush the tears away.

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"Ma, what's wrong?" I asked.

"Nothing a young lad like you has to concern himself with. Everything's going to be okay."

"But, Ma, you ain't been yourself. I'm worried."

"Thanks." Ma wasn't affectionate, but she reached her hand out and patted mine. "You run along to bed now."

It's indelibly imprinted in my brain. The pictures come and go and they get all mixed together. I see my Ma lying in the coffin, a miniature doll in the crook of her arm. The doll, my sister.

I hear her arguing and crying and at night she comes to me and tells me it will be all right. She holds my hand, but I can't stop the tears.

I watch the flames as they lick at the sky. In the flames I see him, the man who took me in. A farmer. I feel the belt straps across my back because I couldn't milk the cows right, because I ate two strawberries as I picked them, the belt on my sunburned back.

I long for Cyrus and wonder if he's still alive. Does he remember our carefree days of swiping apples and swimming in the creek?

The smoke is heavy. The crane and ball smashes into the hotel. Fiery embers fall.

It's not my first fire. They are easy and they were all practise, practise for this one.

I'm an old man now, and I don't like these handcuffs. I'm trembling. I'm laughing. I'm crying. And I'm calling . . . for my Ma.

"Q"

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DEPARTMENT OF "FIRST STORIES"

This is the 568th "first story" to be published by Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine . . . For three weeks Howard had been plagued with dark and violent dreams . . .

The author, Cynthia Darnell, is in her late twenties and has a bachelor's degree in Dramatic Arts from the University of California. "Theater being what it is" these days, she has "held a series of odd jobs since graduation, acting in shows where and when possible (with distressing infrequency)." At the time of this writing she is "doing temporary secretarial work, along with the other nine million Hollywood Unemployed" . . .

NOT A PRETTY STORY

by CYNTHIA DARNELL

"Things," said Howard Kent tentatively as he fished for the olive in his second martini, "have not been going well."

"Ha," said his companion, who had introduced himself as Ralph Braithwaite and who was well into his third martini. "Let me tell you, compared to my life, *yours* is a bowl of roses."

"Bed," Howard corrected. "Bed of roses, bowl of cherries."

"Whatever," Ralph said carelessly. "My point is that you are looking at a ruined man, a man destroyed by the whimsy of fate. You got it easy, believe me."

Ralph then launched into a detailed description of the horrors of military school. Howard sighed and wondered if it was the smoky air or the alcohol that was blurring his vision. Then, when his companion showed no sign of running out of monologue, he wondered why all this wasn't turning out as he had planned.

Howard had come to the bar to get stinking drunk and pour out his troubles to the bartender. This was not something he did habitually. In fact, he'd never done it, he'd got the idea from late-night

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television. But for three weeks he'd been plagued by dreams that were—well, entirely out of character. And now these dark and violent dreams were intruding into his conscious mind. Howard was getting scared and decided he'd better talk to somebody fast.

But the bartender had evidently had not seen the same TV movies. He was much younger than Howard had expected, a surly-looking kid who successfully conveyed the unspoken conviction that his customers were a little less appealing than trash. Howard had made several throat-clearing attempts to speak to him, but the kid had always glared him down.

Then Ralph, in the seat next to him, had tapped him on the shoulder and said thoughtfully, "Life can sure be hell sometimes, can't it?" He was a pallid, underfed man with dark circles under his eyes—just the sort, Howard had thought with distaste, that Jessica always found so appealing.

But Ralph had introduced himself politely enough and had insisted on buying Howard's second drink. And then he had started talking.

Howard had always played by the rules. He had assumed that if he listened to Ralph, eventually Ralph would return the favor and listen to him. But Ralph was still droning on about how miserable he was and how there was no way out for him. Although Howard had made several attempts to steer the conversation toward his own problems, Ralph had cut him off each time.

Suddenly Ralph broke off mid-lament and said, "Are you married?"

This was precisely the opening Howard had been waiting for. "Married," he said eagerly. "Yes, I'm married. In fact, Jessica, my wife, is mostly—"

"Your wife," Ralph snorted. "Your wife, indeed. Your wife, whatever else she may be, is one solitary woman. You think you got problems? Everything I have told you is merely prefatory. Here, look at these." He shifted his weight awkwardly and pulled a wallet from his back pocket. He opened it, flicked his wrist, and a stream of plastic-encased photos cascaded almost to the floor.

Howard stared down at them in amazement. All the pictures were of young women.

"And every one of them dead as the well-known doorknob."

"Doornail," Howard said absently. He was trying to remember another movie he'd seen—one in which a homicidal maniac had kept pictures of his victims in his wallet.

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"This one," Ralph said as he reached down and picked up the endmost photo, "is Millicent. She started it."

Howard took the photo gingerly and looked at a smudgy picture of a flamboyantly unkempt young woman with an extremely vacuous expression.

"You will notice the untidy hair, the feathered earrings," Ralph said. He began folding the pictures back into his wallet. "Millicent belonged to that subclass of human beings called hippies. Remember hippies?"

Howard nodded. "They were—"

"I was a law student at the time," Ralph continued, staring morosely into his glass. "It was too late by that time. Perhaps if I had met her earlier, things would have worked out differently."

"You mean before she became a hippie?" Howard asked him quickly.

Ralph appeared not to have heard him. "By the time we met I was so embittered, so vengeful—did I mention that I had an unhappy childhood?"

"I believe so," Howard said. "But then so did I. For example, when I was only five—"

"You could use another drink," Ralph interrupted and signaled to the bartender. "You'll need it. This is not a pretty story."

He waited until the bartender had brought Howard's drink, then resumed. "I was unloved for most of my life, you have to understand that. All through high school and college the girls ignored me. I used to stand and watch them, thinking how I could offer them love and security and intelligent conversation. But they all preferred the football players, the basketball players, the track team. The *track* team, for Pete's sake."

"I tried out for the track team," said Howard.

"Then," Ralph said, lowering his voice and narrowing his eyes, "I began to watch them and think how I'd like to get even."

"I didn't make it," Howard added, mostly to himself.

"It was at this point that I met Millicent. My second year of law school. She was not, by any stretch of the imagination, the girl of my dreams. In fact, there are those who would have called her downright homely. But she loved me. She said our souls had congruent vectors, whatever that meant."

"It probably meant—"

"Oh, it was pathetic to see. For two months she followed me everywhere, in much the same way as I used to follow the cheerleaders

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around the Student Union. And," he added heavily, "I scorned her."

Ralph fell silent. Howard realized that he would have to speak quickly before he lost the opportunity. "Jessica," he began, as his martini-fogged brain tried to decide exactly what he was going to say. "I used to follow her around—"

Ralph held up a hand, and Howard regretfully but obediently shut up. "I never would have done it if I hadn't been so resentful," Ralph explained. "But I looked at Millicent's homely, hungry little face and I thought, 'Look at that. I, Ralph Braithwaite, actually *hurt* somebody. I can really do it.' I was very proud of myself."

"I can understand that," said Howard. "There are times when I—"

"She killed herself."

Howard gagged.

"She left a note. It was dreadfully misspelled and was written in ink of a peculiar brown color. In the light of later circumstances, I have sometimes speculated on the origin of that ink. At any rate, she said she had friends—powerful friends, whom she had met in Big Sur—who knew how to take care of people like me. She had sent them my name and address."

"A motorcycle gang?" guessed Howard.

"Witches."

"Witches?"

"They put a curse on me. A particularly nasty curse, and they didn't even tell me what it was. They just sent a telegram saying that they had summoned a couple of demons and I would figure it out eventually. Needless to say, I didn't take them seriously."

"Well, of course not. Something that ridiculous—"

"But I paid. And they paid."

"They did? How?"

Ralph looked at him with annoyance. "They're *dead.* I already told you that."

"The witches?" Howard was sure he'd missed something.

"No, no, *no.* The girls, the women, the ladies. I showed you the pictures, didn't I? You're not paying attention."

"Yes, I am," Howard replied indignantly. "These witches of yours went around murdering all your girl friends."

Ralph frowned. "Wrong," he said. "I knew you weren't paying attention. Listen carefully, I'll explain it once again."

"You didn't explain it the first time."

"After Millicent—ah—removed herself, my life changed. I thought that if someone could love me enough to kill herself, perhaps there

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was more to me than I'd thought. It did wonders for my self-confidence. I got up the nerve to speak to the girls. They spoke back. I fell in love."

Howard thought jealously of the string of photos. "With which one?" he asked. He hoped he sounded sarcastic.

Evidently he didn't. "With *all* of them," Ralph replied. "How else do you think I figured out what the curse was? I wish you'd pay attention, this is not an easy thing for me to talk about." He drained his glass, then drained Howard's. "Any woman I fall in love with has only three weeks to live," he said. "I can't put it any more plainly."

"What?"

"It took Anne, Debbie, Irene, Amy, Carolyn, Michelle, Georgia, Mary, and three Susans before I realized it. All ten of them, dead."

"Eleven," said Howard.

"Whatever. I get the Susans confused sometimes. The point is, they're all dead. Car crashes, collapsing bridges, falling rocks, coronary arrests—have you ever heard of a nineteen-year-old having a heart attack? The poor things died because I loved them. I'm a monster." He began to sniffle.

Howard looked away in embarrassment.

"And every one of them loved me."

Howard looked back at him. "What?" He had the feeling he had just heard something important.

"I said, they loved me. They really did, every one of them. Why, little Annie even went so far—"

Howard tuned him out. He had to think. There was something there, something that was trying to swim through the martinis and connect to his brain. It was, it was . . .

It was Jessica. Jessica, who had cheerfully informed him that she'd married him for his credit rating. Jessica, who'd sworn she'd make his life even more miserable if he dared try to divorce her. Jessica, whose coterie of admirers cluttered his living room and ruined his sleep. Jessica, who had laughed so sweetly when he'd warned her she was pushing him too far.

Jessica, who had said she just couldn't help falling in love with all the dear, wonderful men.

"And there was Irene," Ralph was saying, "who told me—"

"Shut up."

"—that she'd never met anyone—"

"Shut up!"

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Howard triumphantly banged his empty glass on the bar. "Quiet, I tell you!"

Ralph's voice cut off, but his mouth kept working as though it had worked up too much momentum to stop. He stared at Howard in amazement.

Howard was somewhat surprised himself, but he took the advantage. "Three weeks, you said?" he demanded.

Ralph nodded wordlessly.

Howard very carefully kept himself from sounding too eager. "And every one of them fell in love with you, right?"

Ralph was nodding as though his head were on a spring.

"Well, yippee," Howard said quietly to himself. Then, more loudly, he said, "Ralph, old boy, what's happened here is that you've just had a run of bad luck and you've let it get to you. There are no witches. There is no curse. You have to quit telling yourself that there is—are. What you need is something to take your mind off your troubles. I'll tell you what." He paused dramatically.

"What?" Ralph said finally.

"Why don't you come home with me? Have dinner. Relax. Be around normal people for a change. Quit thinking you're a freak."

"I couldn't do that," Ralph said. "It would be too much trouble for you."

"Sure you could. No trouble at all. Jessica would love you to come."

"Would she really?"

"With any luck," Howard said happily.

"What?"

"Nothing, nothing. Just you come along with me." Howard stood up and began tugging at Ralph's arm. "Trust me, it'll do wonders."

Ralph raised an unsteady head and looked hopefully at Howard. "Do you really think it'll work?"

Howard smiled, but not at Ralph. "It's worth a try," he said.

"Q"

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DEPARTMENT OF "FIRST STORIES"

This is the 569th "first story" to be published by Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine . . . Well, what can we tell you? Everybody knows you just can't be too careful these days . . .

The author, Jane Carter Lackey, is a native of Nashville, Tennessee, a graduate of Vanderbilt University, and has been "employed by 'The Nashville Tennesseean' as a general assignments reporter covering straight news and feature stories, for approximately eight years." In 1960 she married a patent attorney and has been a housewife ever since; they have one son, a teenager. Mrs. Lackey's hobbies include swimming, tennis, and recently, photography . . .

YOU CAN'T BE TOO CAREFUL

by JANE CARTER LACKEY

"I can't imagine what you're doing," I said to my husband, knowing exactly what he was doing.

He was pulling the kitchen doors open, taking the china out, and placing it on the counter.

"We just can't be too careful these days with all those burglars around stealing anything they can get their dirty hands on," he said.

"Henry, don't tell me you're going to hide the everyday dishes now. The TV is bolted to the floor. Most of our clothes are locked in the trunks upstairs, and you've even stored most of the furniture downtown. What next?"

"I'll tell you what next. You just can't be too careful these days. So I'm having a burglar alarm installed Monday and then we can rest easy. We've got to protect all the silver we have and everything else here."

Well, I looked around and didn't see much else—our house looked

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as though we were moving out. In fact, it looked as though we had already moved.

But we did have a lot of silver—flat silver, tall silver, round silver, square silver—all serving pieces that Henry's Aunt Martha had spent half of her life collecting and the other half polishing.

"I'm going to put that silver in these cabinets and lock it up so we can keep an eye on it," he said.

"Henry, how can we keep an eye on it if it's locked in the cabinets?"

He sighed and kept right on working. He put all the silver in the cabinets, packed up the china, and took it to the attic.

"I'm going down to the hardware store to get some locks for the cabinets. Now lock the doors, don't let anyone in, and if anyone gets in you shoot to kill," he said, handing me his Smith & Wesson.

"But, Henry—"

"Now, I don't have time to tell you that you just can't be too careful these days."

I was beginning to wish he didn't have time to tell me that, but you just don't argue with Henry.

"We're going to keep that gun right there in the dining room, where it'll be close to the kitchen and the rest of the house if anyone gets in," he said. "And if anyone touches those cabinets he's going to be shot."

Henry left. I went to the bathroom and took two tranquilizers. All this talk about someone getting in while he was gone to the hardware store was a little upsetting. What will I do all week when he's working at the Fish Farm, I wondered. That'll be eight hours every day I'll have to protect the silver. Funny, Henry didn't say a thing about protecting me—it was just the darned silver that had to be guarded.

I went to the kitchen, sat down, and began thinking mean thoughts about Henry. A few minutes later he returned with eight Yale locks that looked as if they were made for San Quentin's maximum-security cells.

He bored holes in the lovely yellow cabinets I had painted with great care last spring, installed the locks, then stood back to admire his work.

"Anyone that touches those cabinets is going to be shot," he said with determination.

Henry spent the rest of the weekend securing the house. He checked all the locks on the doors and windows, rechecked them, then added more locks.

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Monday morning he left for work, telling me to look out for the burglar-alarm man. I tried but it was a little difficult since Henry had pasted signs all over the windows.

I read each message—"Burglars Will Be Shot," "All items on these premises have been marked for ready identification by law-enforcement agencies," and "Beware of Cat." I read it again.

"Beware of Cat?"

Well, there's one thing I can say about Henry. He certainly is honest, I thought, looking across the room where our ten-year-old Persian, named Jaws, lay dozing under the kitchen table.

The doorbell rang, cutting into my thoughts. I ran through the dining room, picking up the gun on my way to the front door, and opened it, prepared to blast any intruder into eternity if necessary.

"Mrs. Krepps, I'm Jones from the Buzz Burglar Ala—" His mouth hung open as he stared at the gun pointed at his bulging stomach. Quickly recovering, he continued, "Oh, you don't need that now that we're here. Mr. Krepps told us to be sure to install your burglar alarm today."

I lowered the gun and unlocked the screen door.

"You've made a wise decision to have an alarm put in," he said, surveying the sofa and coffee table, the only furniture left in the living room. "Be a shame to have all these things stolen. You know, you just can't be too careful these days."

"Yes, I know," I said, aware that my fingers were tightening around the gun. If I hear that one more time, I'm going to—I got control of myself and placed the Smith & Wesson firmly on the dining-room table.

"Now, what kind of alarm do you want, Mrs. Krepps—the one that makes a low moaning sound or the shrill squawking kind?"

"I'm feeling more like the shrill squawking kind," I answered weakly.

"Ma'am, you've made a good choice. That really perks up the neighborhood when it goes off."

I wondered if Mr. Jones—or Henry, for that matter—had noticed that we didn't have any neighbors. The closest one, eighty-year-old Mrs. Jayson, lived about two miles down the road. And she was stone-deaf.

"Now Mrs. Krepps, there's one more decision. Where do you want the mats?"

"The mats?"

"We put 'em under the rugs so if burglars get through the windows

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or doors that are wired and into the house, then they'll step on the mats under the rugs. That'll set it off again. Really gives them quite a start."

What rugs, I wondered. Oh, yes, Henry had packed up the rugs and stored them downtown, too. "Oh, just put them anywhere," I answered.

Mr. Jones worked the rest of the day wiring the doors and windows, and boring holes in the floors for the mats.

Henry came home that night and plastered more signs on the windows—"Protected by Buzz Alarms." He installed more locks on the cabinets, inspected the alarm, and checked to see if the gun was loaded and in its proper place in the dining room. "If anyone touches those cabinets, they're going to be shot. You know," he said, as though he had just thought of it, "you just can't be too careful these days."

I took three tranquilizers and went to bed, thinking meaner thoughts about Henry.

The next morning the alarm clock rang at six o'clock. "You've got to get up—the man'll be here to put the bars up," Henry announced before I even opened my eyes.

"What bars?" I asked, afraid that I already knew the answer.

"The burglar bars for the windows, of course." He walked briskly out the door. I gritted my teeth, pulled on my old robe, and stumbled to the kitchen where Henry stood talking to a tall thin man, who looked as though he could slip right through his burglar bars.

"I'll leave you with Mr. Brown, dear," Henry said. "Glad you're here, Mr. Brown, you know you just can't be too careful these days." He shut the door and I heard him start the engine of his car. Mr. Brown began measuring the windows.

"Mrs. Krepps, I'll put them on all the windows and you'll be as safe as can be. You see, the burglar comes up ready to climb into the house and then he sees the bars. Well, that really gives him a jolt. He knows he can't get through these, so he'll just have to climb down the chimney. Now for an extra $100.23 I can put the bars on top of the chimney, too."

"No, thanks, Mr. Brown, I'll just have to take my chances," I said weakly, heading back to the bathroom for more tranquilizers.

I returned to the kitchen and looked at the cabinets where all the silver was, sat down, and watched Mr. Brown installing the bars. I made a little image of Henry in my mind and began sticking imaginary pins in it.

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Several hours later Mr. Brown opened the door. "I'm through, Mrs. Krepps," he said, proudly surveying his work. "You were smart to put these in. You know you just can't be too careful these days. Just give us a call if you change your mind about leaving that chimney wide-open for anyone to climb down."

I squinted through the bars and the signs on the windows, watching Mr. Brown waving gayly as he drove away.

It was midafternoon by then and I remembered there was nothing to cook for dinner. Then I realized I couldn't cook anyway since Henry had packed up all the pots and pans. I'll get some sandwich meat and bread. I picked up my pocketbook, patted Jaws, turned on the burglar alarm, and walked to the garage.

I got in my car, turned on the ignition, pushed down the accelerator, and nothing happened. Not one sound. I got out and opened the hood to find a gaping hole where the battery was supposed to be.

I knew just what had happened—he had taken the battery out so the car wouldn't be stolen.

"Henry, you idiot," I screamed, kicking the car for good measure. I clamped my jaws together, gritting my teeth. But the screaming—a shrill squawking kind of scream continued.

It wasn't my voice at all, I realized. It was the burglar alarm. Jaws must have walked over the mats, setting the alarm off.

I ran to the house, throwing out the contents of my pocketbook as I groped desperately for the burglar-alarm key. It just wasn't there. I ran back to the garage—back to the house—back to the garage, eyes riveted on the ground where I must have dropped it.

I sat down and cried. I couldn't turn the alarm off and I couldn't get back into the house since Henry had carefully put the door keys and the burglar-alarm keys on the same chain.

Then I remembered what Mr. Brown had said about the chimney. Well, if a burglar can go down it, then I can too, rather than sit here until Henry comes home. I found a ladder in the garage that Henry had forgotten to hide.

I pulled it to the house, leaned it against the edge of the roof, and climbed up. No, this is not the way to get in, I thought. But by then it was the only way since the ladder had fallen and was now lying flat on the ground.

I climbed into the chimney, took a deep breath, and forgot to hold on. It was a quick trip down and I landed with a jolt so severe that I thought I had crashed all the way through the fireplace to Henry's

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bomb shelter in the basement. The soot settled over and around me and I opened my eyes to see Jaws observing me casually as if this was my usual mode of entering the house.

I crawled out of the fireplace, limped to the kitchen, found the extra key, and turned the alarm off. I sat on the kitchen chair and brushed soot from my skirt, thinking the meanest thoughts of all about Henry.

A few hours later he walked in. "Well, hello there, dear. Hmmm, looking great!"

Looking great, I thought incredulously. Looking great with soot all over my face and my back permanently out of joint. Then I realized Henry wasn't talking to me at all. He was patting the cabinets.

"Yeah, they're just great," he said, as he fingered the locks tenderly.

I limped out of the room, listening to the whirr of his electric drill as he began putting more locks on the cabinets. "Anyone that touches these cabinets is going to be shot."

I took six tranquilizers and gently, very gently, lowered myself to the bed, turned out the light, and went to sleep.

It must have been about midnight when I heard a strange noise. It wasn't Henry snoring. I had got used to that. I held my breath, listening to a squeaking noise that seemed to be coming from the kitchen.

I got up, fumbled for my robe, and tiptoed out to the dining room. The noise continued as though someone was opening the cabinets. I picked up the gun, moved softly to the breakfast room, and pointed it in the general direction of the cabinets, pulling the trigger four times.

There was a loud thump and I turned on the light.

"Oh, it's you, Henry! What are you doing on the floor?" I walked over and looked down at him.

"Why?" he gasped. "Why did you do it?"

"Well, Henry, you told me that anyone who touches those cabinets is going to be shot," I explained.

Henry's eyes were wide-open—he was really looking at me this time. Then I realized Henry wasn't looking at me. Henry had expired.

I pulled his body out the door, found a shovel in the garage, dug a hole, put Henry in it, and covered him over with dirt, just as neat as could be. Henry would have been proud.

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I went back to the kitchen and started unlocking the cabinets. It took several hours to get all those locks off, but there was plenty of time until morning to do it. I then picked up the silver, packed a suitcase, got hold of Jaws, and put everything in Henry's car.

I turned on the burglar alarm just as he told me to do every time I left the house, started the car, drove to town, sold all that silver, then headed for the airport.

And what was my destination?

I'll never tell.

You just can't be too careful these days.

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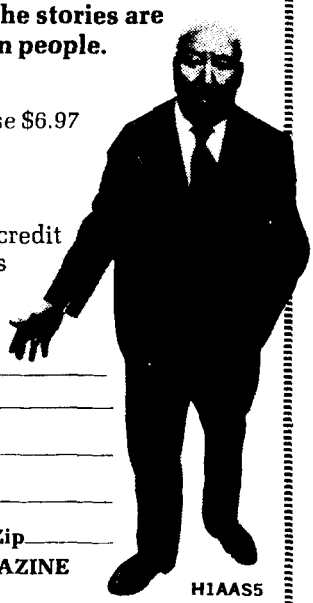

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a *NEW* short story by

ROBERT TWOHY

Robert Twohy lifts the lid on a seamy, seedy side of life—the derelicts and hangers-on and down-and-outers on the fringe of the race game. The view, we warn you, is not edifying—slices of life usually aren't. But take a peek and listen in . . .

THE FIX

by ROBERT TWOHY

Stremberg got the word on the third race at Peninsula Meadows. It came from Vassily, a part-time private guard at the track who knew things. Vassily had given Stremberg three tips in the past five years and they had all paid off. Vassily wasn't a klutz or a juicehead and he knew the race game—and he liked Stremberg who had driven him for years and had done some favors for him. They weren't buddies but they could trust each other.

Vassily said that he knew the trainer of Bugle Call. Bugle had been held back his last six outings to set up a payday. The payday was today, Thursday the 9th. All the jocks were in on it. Bugle would get off at least 20 to 1. He'd run away from the field in the stretch.

Stremberg went to the Tropical Club, which on Thursday morning was pretty full of track fans having a few before taking off for the track. He had two one-dollar bills, three quarters, and two dimes in his pocket. That was all he had to his name. He wasn't working. He'd quit when the horses had come to Peninsula Meadows nearly two months ago. When Ray behind the bar put his beer in front of him Stremberg said, "Ray, you want in on a big one?"

Ray didn't look like he did. Stremberg went on talking, low, "The third is set up. I got the word."

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"That a fact."

"Stake me ten and we'll split. I'll bring you back over a hundred."

Ray looked thoughtful. He stroked his thick chin. Stremberg felt hopeful.

Then Ray said, "Nah," and walked away.

Stremberg lit a cigarette. He looked along the mirror behind the bar, sizing up who was there.

Big Otto. He had the money. But Stremberg was scared of him. Otto was said to be the local syndicate man. He operated a chauffeur service, wore black suits, smoked thin cigars, and was always at the Tropical or the Moondust, drinking cola—never went near his chauffeur service. He had dark patches under tired-looking eyes that looked like he never slept, like maybe he couldn't sleep because the faces of victims and their beat-up bodies kept coming between him and sleep. Stremberg didn't want anything to do with Big Otto.

Graveyard Flo. Tall and skinny with big weird eyes who when you drove her home in the cab sat beside you and stroked your hand with her clammy claws and whispered, "Thank you for being you." Sometimes she threw a fit and went rigid and more than a few times Stremberg had carried her like a plank up the stairs to her second-floor apartment off Floribunda and her husband Curly, who was a railroad accountant with a gimpy leg, would open the door and say, "Oh, damn. Dump her on the couch," and give Stremberg five bucks over the fare.

Flo was sitting alone at a table sipping something foamy in a long-stemmed glass and looking over the daily form. It was worth a shot.

He went over to her with his beer. "How's it going, Flo?"

She looked at him with her big weird eyes.

"You, uh, see anything good going today?" He indicated the form.

She said, in a loud voice, "Do I know you?"

"Sure. Stremberg. You know, the cab driver."

"Ray, do I know this person?"

Everybody turned to look. Ah, hell, thought Stremberg, she's in one of her goofy moods.

"Quit yelling, Flo," said Ray.

"Is this the kind of place where a ratty-looking individual comes up and fersts himself off on a lady? Is that the kind of dump you run here?"

She was starting to breathe funny. Her eyes had begun to roll. She was stiffening.

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Ray called, "Stremberg, get the hell away from her."

"Yeah," said Stremberg. He went back to the bar.

Ray said, "Stay away from her."

"I will."

"She's ready to throw one. She went out of here last night with a guy whose wife caught up with them in the Moondust and bopped her on the head five times with a beer glass."

Stremberg shook his head, and sipped his beer. He looked in the mirror and saw that Flo had stopped going stiff, and was quietly sipping her drink and flicking her fingernail over the form.

He said when Ray came back up the bar, "Say, Ray, are you sure—"

"I'm sure."

Tiny Jane, about 70, with a face all blown up from drinking, slid up to Stremberg. She held her little green coin purse in both spotty hands. "I heard what you said to Ray when you came in. You need backing?"

"Hello, Tiny," he said, suddenly very weary.

"You're a nice little fella." Her voice was a creaky whisper. "You ain't a bad little fella at all. I'll stake you fifty dollars."

"Fine, Tiny."

She struggled the snaps of her purse open, stuck shaky fingers in, pulled out a nickel and a penny. He took them. "Thanks, Tiny."

"I trust you. You can bring me the money tonight. Now you can buy me a drink." Her face parted in a horrible grin.

She climbed like somebody climbing a fence up on the stool next to him. Ah, hell, thought Stremberg, and felt defeated. "Ray," he said, and thumbed at Tiny.

Ray poured her a shot of brandy, water back, and took all Stremberg's money except one buck and Tiny's six cents.

Hell, he thought, I'm out $1.95 already and I still don't have any backing.

Tiny took the brandy down in one loud suck. She moaned and sighed and tears ran down her swollen cheeks that looked ready to split open and spray liquor all over the place.

Stremberg looked at the clock. Past 11:30. Some of the fans were drifting out, to get down to the track—first post, 12:30.

The guy that always wore two hats, a dark regular hat and a kind of straw hat under it, and a pair of woman's dark glasses, came up on the other side of Stremberg. He was the guy who had once been a dentist with a big practice in town, and an estate on the hill. He

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said, sharp and low, "I got a good one going today."

"Yeah?" said Stremberg.

"Yeah. In the sixth. Split ten and I'll bring you back over $100."

"I'm not working. I only got a buck."

"Well, give me the buck then." The dentist sounded irritated.

Stremberg heard Tiny sighing on his left. The dentist had his hand out, was jiggling his fingers, getting impatient. Stremberg got a sudden strange and sinking feeling that he had no will of his own. He gave the dentist his last buck.

"Okay." The dentist went down the bar to hit up someone else.

Stremberg shook his head. I don't even know him, he said to himself. Why the hell did I give him my last buck?

He had the impulse to go after the ex-dentist and get his buck back, but that was stupid. You don't go chasing after a guy in a bar where you're known and argue about a buck.

But now all he had left was Tiny's six cents, half a pack of butts, and about an inch of beer.

Tiny said, "I could handle another."

"I'm sorry, Tiny."

"You're *sorry!*" Her voice was thin with amazement. She shook her blown-out cheeks at him. "Ray," she shrilled. "Ray!"

Ray happened to be three feet away, drawing a beer. "Yeah, Tiny," he said, not looking up.

"Can you imagine anyone as mean as this? I sit and talk with this man and he won't even buy me a drink!"

"Yeah, Tiny." Ray looked at Stremberg and there was a twist to his lips. "It don't seem like your day."

"Not yet it don't."

Tiny said, "That's dirty pool, mister! You know what? I'm a friend of Big Otto. He's right down the bar there."

"I know."

"You could be found in the alley with big red holes in your head."

She half slid, half fell from the stool. "Don't get smart with me," she said, and departed.

Ray drew a beer and put it in front of Stremberg.

Stremberg nodded, and drank half of it.

Ray lingered. "You really got something in the third?"

"Yeah. From Vassily."

"I don't know him. Do I?"

"Prob'ly not. He don't make the bars. But he's on the inside. He knows his stuff."

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Ray reached in his pocket. "Okay." He handed over a $10 bill.

"Thanks, Ray. But now I need $3.50 more."

"Why?"

"Two-fifty to get in, buck for bus fare."

"Okay," said Ray, reaching again. "But that's a loan. You owe me $3.50."

"Thanks, Ray."

"Which horse?"

The bar was emptying, nobody was near, but you don't take chances. You want to keep the odds up. Stremberg put a hand to the side of his face, just scratching his cheek if anyone on that side was watching. He said low, "Bugle Call."

Ray raised his eyebrows, pursed his lips. "What's he done?"

"Nothing—never been close. They been setting it up for today. All the jocks are in on it."

Ray shook his head. Then he said, "Well, what do *I* know? I ain't had a winner all meet."

Stremberg finished his beer and pushed back from the bar.

As he got off the stool he realized he was being stared at. He turned. Graveyard Flo was the starer.

"Wait a minute!" she yelled, and her eyes started to roll. "Ray," she screamed, "who *is* that little rat?"

Ray said, "Get out of here, Stremberg."

"I'm going." He hurried out, as Flo kept screaming.

Ten minutes later he caught the bus. It was crowded. He stood in the aisle. A man pressed against him with a hard fat stomach. The man started to look at him, and Stremberg looked away. But there was no room to look away. To his right was someone's red neck with blisters. To his left was a woman's coiled blue hair. He couldn't turn his head far enough either way to avoid the fat man's stare.

He looked down, then up. Finally there was nothing to do but look back at the man.

The eyes were glazed, yellow-green. Under them was a pitted nose and under that a mouth which, as Stremberg helplessly stared, began to curve in a smile that got wider and wider, until Stremberg got a feeling the tongue was going to come looping out, like a soft sticky pink hook, and clamp around his neck.

He shuddered, tried to close his eyes—but they wouldn't close. The guy is hypnotizing me, he thought helplessly. Now why in hell is he doing that?

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Then the bus slammed to a stop and everybody staggered around and fell into each other, and the hypnotist fell and staggered like everyone else, and Stremberg was freed from his spell. He stayed behind him as they all got off and from the rear the man seemed to be just an ordinary person, just a normal sloppy fat man hurrying to the track.

Stremberg thought suddenly, I'm pretty light-headed. He couldn't remember when he'd last had a meal.

He ran the gauntlet of hot-sheet touts, shouting and snarling in their booths, paid his entrance fee, and was in under the grandstand. He stood smoking cigarettes and watching while the first two races were run, with a Daily Double payoff of $42.60. Then the morning line started flashing for the third.

He copped a look at someone's program. Bugle Call was post position 6. The morning line was 15 to 1.

Stremberg waited, jumping around, smoking more cigarettes. The tote odds were climbing. Big Otto and his henchmen; who of course knew when a fix was on, were letting this one go by. They did that a lot—they knew what they were doing. Get too greedy and jump in on every boat ride and the public starts to catch on when the price dip shows suddenly on the tote, and then everyone's jumping in and it's a messed-up situation. The syndicate knows when to lie low.

40 to 1, the tote said now. $400 to split with Ray. Stremberg tried to keep his face mask-like, but realized that he was walking around in a tight quick circle and smacking his palms together. A man and a girl were looking at him. The girl giggled.

Stremberg hit his palms together a few more times, with a serious expression on his face like someone with a circulation problem who knows what he's doing, then walked away flopping his hands like checking to be sure the blood was flowing again. He thought he had done it in a cool way but as he walked away the girl seemed to be giggling louder.

He saw it was four minutes to post and hurried to the parimutuel lineup. The flashboard on the wall showed that Bugle Call was now 50 to 1. $500 to split with Ray. The syndicate hadn't jumped in on this one, just like he'd figured they wouldn't.

He put Ray's $10 on Number 6 to win, went back outside, and stood there tense and still, watching as they loaded the horses into the starting gate. Bugle Call went in prancing. He looked fit and sharp. His jock seemed to wear a tight, knowing grin. The grin was

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to let those in on the fix know that everything was set, on target.

The starting bell yanged, the gates whanged open.

Bugle broke good, and hitting the first turn of the mile race the jock had him tucked in at the rail in third place, two lengths back and running low and easy. Stremberg felt the deep joy he had been waiting to feel since the meet started 51 racing days ago beginning to build inside him.

Bugle ran smooth and easy through the back stretch and around the far turn, holding fourth now, five lengths back, and came out of the turn near the middle of the track with room on the outside, in perfect position—all the jocks had done their job, all cooperating to get Bugle positioned like this. Just like Vassily had said, he was going to run away from the field, a clear sweep down the stretch. The jock got ready to unload with the whip, and the deep joy swelled in Stremberg.

Then the horse hung.

Stremberg couldn't believe it. He watched it and couldn't believe it. It was like the animal had run into an 80-mile head wind. His legs moved like each shoe weighed 35 pounds. Everyone sailed past him up the stretch.

He couldn't believe it. Everything had gone just right all the way from the start.

And the jock had had that tight little grin.

Stremberg was walking toward the exit, fingering the six cents in his pocket, when it all came clear to him.

For reasons of its own the syndicate, which hadn't got in on this one, wanted the fix off. Maybe they'd got a flash that some Congressional committee investigating rackets in sports had got wind of the Bugle Call fix and was busy rigging up evidence that would make it look like the syndicate was behind the fix. So the syndicate flashed the word to the track to the guys behind the fix to take it off, and right now—and seconds from the finish, when he was starting up the stretch, the jock got the flash from the stands: It's off, pull him.

So the jock, hip as all jocks are, did as he was ordered.

Near the exit Stremberg saw Vassily, sagging against a wall, with a kind of stunned look on his face.

Vassily didn't duck away. He looked Stremberg in the eyes and mumbled, "I sure thought I was giving you the straight goods."

"You were," said Stremberg. "You couldn't know it would get called off."

Vassily rubbed his hand over his mouth. His eyes looked kind of

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stunned again. Then he said, "Yeah. Right. That's something you can't figure on."

"The syndicate does what they have to do."

"Right. They do what they have to do."

Stremberg fingered the six cents in his pocket. "Got a buck I can borrow for bus fare?"

Vassily went through his pockets. He had 23 cents. "I put all I had, $27, on Bugle Call."

Stremberg churned up a smile, to let Vassily know that Stremberg knew that if Vassily had a buck he'd lend it to Stremberg. "See you around." He turned away.

Vassily said, "You want the twenty-three cents?"

"No, that's okay."

"How you going to get home?"

"I'll probably run into someone I know with a car." He said goodbye to Vassily, and went out the exit.

In the parking lot he stopped to light his last butt. He stood and smoked it, then dropped it, and started walking the four miles home.

About four o'clock he got to the room he had at Mrs. Mustie's, and was glad to see her car gone, so she couldn't hassle him about the rent being eight days late. He locked his door, took off his shoes and jacket, stretched out on the bed, and went to sleep.

He woke up to hammering on the door. It was dark outside the window. Mrs. Mustie's terrible voice yelled, "Stremberg! I know you're in there! Open the door!" She kept on hammering and yelling as he lay quiet.

Finally her husband called from downstairs, "Oh, for Pete's sake, knock it off."

"The door's locked! He's in there!"

"So he's in there. So he ain't got the dough, so he ain't answering—what's the good hollering?"

"You know what's going to happen tomorrow, Stremberg?" she yelled. "Tomorrow a padlock goes on this door!"

Stremberg waited until she had lumped away down the stairs. Then he got up and stood at the window. He hoped she'd go out again. She spent most of every day going out somewhere or coming back. In a little while her mean-looking little white car rolled away down the drive.

He got his shoes and jacket back on, and put socks, shorts, two shirts, pants, comb, toothbrush, and razor, which were all the things he had in the world except what he was wearing, in the big grocery

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bag he carried them in when he moved. He opened the door and called, "Mr. Mustie?"

"Yeah, Stremberg."

"I'll be going. You better take a look so she won't yell I've swiped something."

A chair wheezed and Mr. Mustie came in sight, holding his evening *Courier*. He climbed the stairs while Stremberg waited. He said, "Where you going to go?"

"I'll find a place. I'll bring her the dough when I get it."

"Yeah." Mr. Mustie looked around the room, picked up the painted china ashtray that was a nicely shaped pair of woman's hands, looked at it, looked surprised that he was looking at it, then set it down. "Okay, Stremberg. Take it easy."

"Yeah," said Stremberg.

He went downstairs and out the door.

He walked eight blocks to the Tropical. There was a good crowd. Big Otto was there, drinking cola and rolling poker dice with some guys Stremberg didn't know, at a dollar a flop. Flo was at the bar with a short punk who looked like bad news. Tiny wasn't in sight. He was glad of that.

He got a stool near the door. Ray come over. Stremberg laid the $10 win ticket on Bugle Call in front of him. "Everything was great and then the fix came off."

Ray tossed the ticket behind the bar. "You owe me $3.50."

"Right. How about a beer?"

Ray shrugged and drew one.

"Got a cigarette?"

Ray gave him one.

Stremberg sat there drinking and smoking. He looked in the mirror and saw the dentist with two hats sitting at a table with a couple of women and laughing, his mouth wide showing a few whole teeth but mostly yellow stumps. He wore the woman's dark glasses that he always wore. There was a pile of money by his hand. The three of them looked pleased with life.

The dentist raised his glass. "To Trader Jack and Vinnie Espinosa, the best damn jockey at the meet!" The women said, "Hurray!" and laughed and drank, while the dentist grinned at them with his stumps.

Stremberg called, "Ray."

Ray came over.

"Who won the sixth?"

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Ray was silent. Then he walked away. He conferred with Big Otto, and came back.

"Trader Jack. Paid 60 to 1."

Stremberg went over to the dentist. "Remember me?"

"Sure. You're the cab driver."

"I split a bet with you today on Trader Jack."

"Did you?" The dark glasses caught the light and gave a sparkle. "No, not Trader Jack. Little Steamy."

Stremberg looked at the money on the table. "Little Steamy?"

"Yeah, that was my tip. He run a damn fine race, but didn't have it in the stretch."

Stremberg nodded at the money. "Didn't you win that betting on Trader Jack?"

"Yeah, I did actually. But I put your buck and another guy's dough on Little Steamy, which was my tip. Trader Jack was just a wild hunch I played because one of my ex-wives is named Jacqueline."

Stremberg nodded. What was the use?

"Have a beer," the dentist invited.

"Thanks, I got one at the bar."

"You need money or anything? You want a buck?"

"That's okay." Stremberg went back to his drink. He said to Ray, who was near, "I ought to have my butt kicked. I split a bet with him and didn't get the name of the horse."

Ray pulled his lips in and shook his head slowly, like someone looking at a pitiful specimen.

Stremberg nodded, agreeing with Ray's shake. "I just ain't been with it today."

He finished his beer, picked up his bag, and walked down the block to the hole-in-the-wall Red & Black cab office. All the cabs were off the stand. A sharp-faced old Swede lounged behind the counter.

"Hello, Oscar."

"Hello, Stremberg."

"How's it going?"

"Not too bad."

Stremberg leaned on the counter, setting his bag on it. "Got a smoke?"

Oscar gave him a cigarette. Stremberg lit it.

"Need a driver?"

Oscar looked at him a while with his pale blue eyes. "You figure to go back to work?"

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"Yeah."

"Horses not treating you so good?"

Stremberg fished in his pocket and laid his six cents on the counter.

Oscar said, "You had nearly three thousand bucks when you quit. You said you was going to make a killing, you'd never drive cab again."

"I guess I did say that."

"You'll never beat the horses, Stremberg."

Stremberg didn't answer. It wasn't the time to argue about it.

Oscar smoked, and eyed him. "Okay, I'll put you back on. You ain't a drunk and you're honest, or reasonably honest, and you ain't smashed up any of my cabs. Next time you quit me though, don't bother coming back."

"Okay," said Stremberg. "Listen, Oscar, can I sleep in a cab tonight?"

"Throw you out of your room?"

"Yeah."

Oscar said, "All right." Then he reached in a pocket. "Here's three bucks. Go get yourself something to eat, you look like someone's been dug up."

"Okay."

"And clean up in the washroom before you start on shift tomorrow."

"Okay."

A man came in. "You got the racing form?"

"Sure." There was a pile on the desk behind the counter. Oscar handed one to the man and accepted a buck, which he dropped in a cigar box.

The man leaned on the counter, slit the paper open with the side of his hand, worked a cigar around in his mouth, and said, "You got anything for tomorrow?"

"I ain't a horse player," Oscar said.

The man glanced at Stremberg. "*You're* a horse player. I've seen you down at the track."

"I used to be," Stremberg said. "I gave it up."

"You're smarter than I am." The man went out.

Stremberg walked up the block past the Tropical Club toward the bowling alley where they had a lunch counter. He'd get a pack of cigarettes from the machine there, and still have enough for a burger and coffee. It had been a long time since he'd eaten.

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He thought of Bugle Call, and shook his head. He didn't blame Otto, or the syndicate—they only did what they had to do. They had to protect themselves when Congressional committees got too nosey.

He took a few deep breaths of the crisp autumn night air. He glanced in a store window as he passed and was surprised how pale and seedy and caved-in he looked.

Driving cab in the winter months ain't a bad job. You can make a buck.

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a *NEW* short story by

WILLIAM BANKIER

Corey Telford came to London from Canada in search of fame and fortune. Thirty years old, a handsome bachelor, articulate in four languages, he went where he chose, did what he liked. Then he met Stephanie Robson . . .

HAPPINESS YOU CAN COUNT ON

by WILLIAM BANKIER

Corey Telford first came from Canada to London in search of fame and fortune. He settled for a good living as a correspondent sending back voice reports of European news stories to the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation in Montreal. Thirty years old, a handsome bachelor, articulate in four languages, Telford indulged himself for the first year, going where he chose, doing what he liked. Then he fell in love with Stephanie Robson.

They met at a publicity reception for a West End play. Telford was freeloading on his press pass. Stephanie was there because one of the actors had worked recently at the Richmond Theatre where she was assistant stage manager. They drank a lot of white wine together and Telford drove her home to suburban Surrey on a June evening with the sky red and pale-green after ten o'clock.

She was absolutely made for Telford. He liked strong women. Stephanie was solidly built, her chestnut hair shorn shoulder-length and scented with whatever she used to keep it shiny. In repose, her face—slightly protruding upper lip, heavy eyebrows, high cheek-bones, slanting eyes—could be called fierce. When she smiled, a magnetic delight radiated from her. Telford knew a lot of men would

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think her "butch." But she was exactly his cup of tea, not to say his roast-beef sandwich.

The attraction was mutual. Saying goodbye with false dawn in the sky, Stephanie stood in the semi-basement doorway of her bed-sitter on Richmond Hill and frowned at him. "Are you sure you weren't just released from prison?" she said.

"I'll never be a free man again," Telford countered happily. He walked along the Royal Terrace to where he had parked his car. The Thames curved like spilled silver far below between dark trees.

To be closer to Stephanie on a daily basis, Telford moved out of his flat in Chelsea and into rooms which were part of one of the big white houses overlooking the cricket pitch on Richmond Green. His landlord was a friendly businessman named Ferguson Cruft. Cruft owned the largest Ford dealership in Surrey, purchased by him years before with inherited money when a pound was worth over three dollars; he was a wealthy man.

"Have a housewarming drink," he said on the first day, appearing in the rose-festooned kitchen doorway to catch Telford as he emerged from his private entrance at the back of the house.

"I won't say no."

Telford followed his host into the kitchen and on through into a small room where most of a precious oriental rug was hidden under Jacobean furniture. Crystal gleamed behind cabinet doors and there were family photographs in oval silver frames. Dark beams crossed the ceiling.

Cruft poured whisky into squat tumblers. He raised his eyebrows and the water carafe at the same time. Telford nodded in silence, inhaling the dry smell of security, grateful to share some of it, not envious. After all, he had Stephanie—let Ferguson Cruft top that.

They were standing drinking, an English custom, when Beryl Cruft came into the room. She smiled at Telford but not before he caught the disapproving glance she gave the whisky bottle. Her husband escaped censure—the bottle took the blame.

"All settled in, then?" she said. "No thank you, Fergie, much too early for me. Will you have some supper with us, Mr. Telford? You'll be too tired to prepare your own."

"Thank you, another time. I'm meeting my friend. She works at the theater down the road."

"Ah. Very nice." Cruft beamed down at his wife. He was a substantial cedar tree of a man, rusty-haired with massive trunk and spreading arms which he liked to drape companionably over family

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or friends or customers. Anyone within arm's reach of Fergie Cruft might at any moment be drawn against him and smiled down upon. Beryl Hees-Cruft, as she was addressed on her copious daily post, was one of those alert, grey, bird-women who park their tiny cars on English high streets and run in and out of shops. Her tweed skirt stopped at the knees, leaving sinewy legs to extend into flat shoes. Telford looked away.

"Feel free to entertain your friends when you like," Cruft said. "The only house rule is be happy."

"Is she an actress?" Beryl inquired.

The summer was such perfection that when a wasp stung Telford on the neck in September it seemed no more than an adjustment of the balance of his life toward a more realistic alignment. He had been active for weeks with Stephanie. On a bright Saturday they went walking in Richmond Park, where herds of deer browsing in tall grass and the persistent clouds of black flies filled Telford's imagination with thoughts of the African savannah. On a rainy Sunday they drove to Teddington and enjoyed a lavish cream tea in a cottage named after the Eighteenth Century actress Peg Woffington who was said to have lived there.

On a late evening in July the young couple entered a roadhouse outside Twickenham and came upon Ferguson Cruft and a dark-haired woman at a table near the back door. They were head-to-head over empty glasses, his hand touching hers.

"Where are we going?" Stephanie asked as Telford steered her abruptly into another room.

"That looks like my landlord," he said. "But it doesn't look like my landlord's wife."

"Shocking." She bit him on the cheek. "That house will be a wicked influence on you."

"Is there such a thing as contributing to the delinquency of a pervert?"

"Guilty, your honor. And proud of it."

When Cruft led his woman outside, Telford had a better look at her through a window. She was pleasantly heavy with shiny black hair braided and pinned. Unfastened, it would make a spectacular display. Her eyes were dark and intelligent. The pair of them floated to Cruft's car as if they had been drinking for some time.

The wasp that got Telford found him when he was fishing for his front-door key late one afternoon. The insects were everywhere these

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days, one per flower and enough left over to make you think twice before reaching into the window of a pastry shop for a couple of jam tarts. The locals said they were "dozey" at this time. As he took out his key, Telford felt a movement on the back of his neck, brushed at it, and experienced a sharp pain. The wasp fell to the pavement where Telford mashed it under his shoe.

Two days later, he mentioned to his landlord that he was still feeling pain in the swelling on his neck and a bit of discomfort under his right arm. "Some people are allergic to stings," Cruft said. "Let me telephone Dr. Hathaway for you." As he made the appointment, Fergie draped a reassuring arm over Telford's shoulder.

The doctor's surgery was within walking distance. Telford went there, surprised that the health service would see him so promptly for such a non-emergency. When he was greeted at the door by Dr. Hathaway, he was surprised again. She was the dark woman from Cruft's roadhouse rendezvous.

A short course of antibiotics was prescribed. The doctor seemed to think Telford's place of residence made him a favored patient. She said her name was Rita. "I've been the Crufts' family doctor for a long time. He's a marvelous man."

"Yes, I like Fergie very much."

"He never thinks of himself. He's the sort of man who can keep something hidden for years, just to spare others."

Telford wondered if Rita Hathaway was referring to Cruft's relationship with her. It seemed she was not. "I suggested he at least tell his son," the doctor said cryptically as she handed over a scribbled prescription. "Sebastian's stock in trade is, after all, secrets. What about the confessional? But Fergie said no."

"Sebastian?"

"Their only son. You must have seen his picture on the mantelpiece."

"The priest?"

"Yes. Sebastian converted to Catholicism years ago. His parish is in Yorkshire."

Telford went away with a confused mind. The Crufts had a son in the Catholic clergy. Fergie had a secret that he was concealing from his family but not from his doctor. What was going on?

Telford's wasp-sting responded quickly to the antibiotic. This was a good thing because his swollen neck was inhibiting Stephanie's embrace. They celebrated with an evening at her bedsitter on the

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hill. When he arrived back down at the house on the Green, tousled and spent, Telford was surprised to find the lights on and the side door open. Fergie heard him walking by and called him in. It was a full family conference, plus physician.

"Meet my son, Sebastian. Mr. Telford is a famous voice in Canada. He's on the radio from London more than Ed Murrow used to be."

The young priest was a sober individual. He was his father with all the love of life drained out of him. His chin showed a couple of shaving cuts and his eyes suggested he might have enjoyed inflicting them. He gave Telford a tentative handshake and sat back down. Rita Hathaway sat in a deep chair holding a whisky glass with both hands in a dramatic pose, all eyes and pouting lips. She might have been about to bless sacramental wine. Fergie was drinking too. Mother and son were dry.

"We're digesting some bad news," Beryl said in a scolding tone. "The family is deciding what to do."

"I have already decided," Cruft said. "And it isn't bad news. How many men receive the sort of warning given to me? Without it, I might have refused my competitor's offer to buy my business. I might have gone on and on until—who knows?"

After a silence, Dr. Hathaway explained: "Fergie and I have done some tests. He's been experiencing symptoms for quite a while. The fact is, his heart will not let him pursue an active life any longer."

"It's all the drinking," Beryl said to her son.

"Drinking makes me happy," Cruft said. He turned to Telford. "Here's the plan. I've accepted a huge offer—not a king's ransom but a couple of princes' ransoms—to buy my business. When the deal goes through, I'm off to Canada, just me, to visit my old haunts."

Sebastian glanced at his father with a glitter of respect in his china eyes. "Father was an instructor with the Commonwealth Air-Training Plan during the war," he said. "He spent four years at Trenton in Ontario."

"I don't expect to see a lot of the old people," Cruft said. "Perhaps a few, and some of the familiar places." He sighed and raised his glass in Rita's direction. She toasted him silently.

A few weeks later, Ferguson Cruft purchased a round-trip ticket from Air Canada. As it turned out, the airline had to refund half the fare because Fergie ended up coming home in Rita Hathaway's suitcase. Telford explained the circumstances to Stephanie during the interval at the Aldwych Theatre where they had gone to see the

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Royal Shakespeare Company production of Marlowe's *Dr. Faustus*.

"Fergie was a unique man," Telford said, sipping tepid gin in the Circle Bar. "So open. On the day I met him, he made me feel I'd known him for years."

"I'm sorry he died."

"All alone over in Canada." Telford sighed. "I suppose it was what he wanted. He knew he was going. His doctor told me the symptoms were present for years but he told nobody till near the end."

While Stephanie pretended not to be bored, Telford related the details of Cruft's death in Trenton. It had been sudden. A local doctor had wired Rita Hathaway the news, following instructions on a card Cruft carried with him. Rita volunteered to fly out and claim the body and bring it home. Beryl accepted this arrangement because both women knew Rita would make a better job of it.

Unfortunately, there was a misunderstanding on the part of the Trenton undertaker. When Dr. Hathaway arrived, she discovered that Fergie's body had been cremated. After the initial shock, she saw the event as a convenience and she was able to put this point of view across successfully in a transatlantic call to Beryl. Next day she flew home with Fergie's ashes in a small sky-blue urn which rested now on the Richmond mantelpiece beside the photograph of Father Sebastian Cruft.

This macabre story almost spoiled the evening for Stephanie. Her mood was restored only by the sight of a half naked, screaming actor slithering through a crevice in the stage into smoke and realistic flames. She was nice to Telford when they went to his place later that night but she let it be understood she wanted to hear no more about the late Ferguson Cruft.

The way things turned out, Stephanie was soon in danger of hearing very little more from Telford about anything. His CBC employers summoned him back to Montreal for discussions about his future status. The ominous words "budgetary considerations" were mentioned.

Saying his farewells, hoping to be back soon, Telford dropped around to take his leave of Dr. Hathaway. She was gone. Her replacement explained that Rita had finally become fed up with the bureaucracy of the National Health Service. She had been hanging on only because of connections with certain private patients. That situation had changed with Cruft's death and she had taken off for Montreal.

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During the week of his departure, Telford was trapped into a conversation with the widow Beryl. He had been avoiding her. While her husband was alive, she had existed as a dim figure in the shadow of his larger-than-life personality. Now that Fergie had been cut down, she stood alone in the foreground of Telford's awareness, a forlorn woman but somehow demanding and vaguely dangerous.

On this day, she maneuvered him into the sitting room and poured two whiskies. The guest's drink was not large but her own was barely a stain on the bottom of the glass. "You will be back, won't you?" she asked. "I'd like to know how to think of the apartment."

A week ago, shocked by his summons back to Montreal, Telford had blurted out the risk of losing his job. "I hope so," he said. "If the news is bad, I'll let you know in time to rent the apartment."

"It isn't the rent. Ferguson left me the house free and clear and most of the proceeds from the sale of the business. He also did well by Sebastian. No, we're fine." She dampened her lower lip with whisky. "It's a matter of missing you. I've become quite used to having you in the house, Corey."

He returned her smile with an effort. She had aged after her husband's death. There was a brittle look about her hair and the backs of her hands gleamed like wax. Telford began to suspect, irrationally, that the breath she was exhaling might be poisonous. He excused himself and, as an antidote, hurried to see Stephanie.

Back in Montreal, his worst fears were realized. Hébert, the director, was diplomatic and apologetic but the decision had been made. The Corporation would buy reports when needed from Europeans on the scene. Telford was to come home where some sort of work would be found for him.

"*Bien, c'est pas mal,*" Hébert said. "You had a good run, eh? Now you come back to Montreal."

"I suppose so," Telford said. Were it not for Stephanie, he might have come back willingly. But he could not leave her. It was out of the question. There had to be a way for him to go on living in London.

"Cheer up." Hébert took something from a drawer in his desk. "Here's a spare ticket for the Expos game. Go and enjoy yourself."

Telford went to the Rainbow Bar, where he stuffed himself with spinach pie and made himself fairly drunk on the bourbon he could seldom find in English pubs. Then he rode the gleaming new Metro line to the Olympic Stadium. The place was crowded. The Expos,

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for the first time in their brief history, were making a run at the National League pennant. Stargell and his accomplices were in town from Pittsburgh to show the locals that the good experienced team will always beat the good young one.

The game was exciting and Telford managed to lose himself in it. During the seventh-inning stretch, he stood and looked around, comparing the spectacular stadium with the bandbox intimacy of the old Jarry Park.

That was when he saw Fergie Cruft sitting four rows behind him, drinking from a large carton of beer. Rita Hathaway was doing the same. They were flushed and fat and smugly alive. Telford sat down and divided his attention between the game and the ghost behind him. When the last Expo was out and the crowd moved to the exits, he kept the pair in sight, overtaking them in the parking lot.

"I don't believe this, Fergie," he said.

"Hello there, Corey. Wasn't that a great game? Baseball is one of the things I missed when I went back to England in 1946." Cruft seemed unembarrassed. His massive arm encircled Telford and steered him into the back seat of the sedan. He followed the puzzled broadcaster inside while Rita slid behind the wheel and drove downtown, glancing anxiously from time to time in the rearview mirror.

Telford held his tongue until they arrived at a house in Westmount near the park. It was not as grand as the residence in Richmond, but inside it showed the confident disarray of rooms that are happily lived in. An obvious difference in Fergie's new life style was the size and prominence of his liquor cabinet. When they were seated with full glasses, Telford got to the point.

"I won't say I'm not happy to see you alive and kicking," he said, "but what's the story?"

"A hoax, of course. I had to get away from Beryl. I had to be able to settle down with Rita."

"So you faked the whole thing?"

"That's right," Rita said. She was sharing the sofa with her man, the two of them thigh to thigh, close as animals in a burrow. The couple adored each other and Telford was reminded of himself and Stephanie. "Even the symptoms I told you about. We worked it all out. Fergie is perfectly healthy. But we told Beryl and Sebastian he had been keeping his heart condition a secret for years. Then it worsened, we said, and the trip to wartime haunts became now or never."

"But how did you get a Canadian doctor to go along with you?"

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"There was no Canadian doctor. Fergie simply sent me a wire with the bad news, signed by a phony name. I showed Beryl and convinced her I should come over. I flew to Montreal, picked up an urn from an undertaker's supply shop, and flew back. The ashes I collected from my fireplace."

"It's too easy," Telford protested. "It could never work."

"Why not?" Fergie asked, generously refilling glasses. "Nobody had any reason to query the situation. My family doctor said I was terminal. She brought back the remains. My wife and son were both bequeathed a great deal of money and property." He smiled. "The only people who probe deaths are insurance investigators. But I had no insurance. My money was in negotiable securities."

"Not all of it," Rita said. "For a few years, Fergie has been taking cash out of the business and buying diamonds. When he came away, he brought them with him. We're living on them now, and on my savings."

"But why go to all this trouble? Couldn't you have divorced Beryl and remarried in England?"

"With my son a Roman Catholic priest? Impossible."

"It still seems like a complicated business just to unload an unwanted wife."

"Not very. It was exciting, in fact. Never forget, people feed on excitement. Boredom is what grinds us down." Fergie put his arm around Rita's shoulders and they sat there radiating satisfaction.

"Besides," he went on, "Beryl wouldn't let me drink. That may sound ridiculous—she couldn't stop me— What I mean is she took the fun out of it. Is alcohol that important? To me it is. Rita and I have a whole range of places we go to—hotel lounges, hole-in-the-wall bars, brasseries—and we have this place. There's always warmth and music and conversation. Dreams. Memories." He raised his glass. "And this. It's happiness I can count on. I turn it on every day, like lighting the fire." His face became a little sad. "Back home it was denied me. Rita and I had to steal a few hours here and there. Poor Beryl—she can't help thinking there's something wicked about it."

Telford went back to his hotel bemused by the story—not critical of the devious couple, but feeling their situation had some significance for him.

He awoke in the morning knowing what it was.

"It's me, Fergie," he said on the telephone after breakfast. "We

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talked so much about you two last night I hadn't a chance to mention *my* problem."

He went on to describe his loss of London employment and his conviction that without Stephanie he wouldn't survive. "So I don't know what to do," he concluded. "I've got to get my hands on a chunk of money to keep me in Richmond at least until I can—" He stopped.

Cruft let silence accumulate. When he spoke there was only a hint of annoyance in his voice. "I understand your wish to stay with the woman you love. You and me and Edward the Eighth. I can let you have some money. Shall we say five thousand dollars?"

"In cash, please, Fergie."

He picked up the money the next day, his bags packed, his hotel bill paid, the plane ticket in his pocket. Fergie and Rita did not offer him a drink. They did not ask him to sit down. He took the envelope and went away with his face burning, knowing they had paid him off just to be rid of him. The word "blackmail" had not been mentioned.

Well, damnit, they were getting away with murder, or something akin to it. By cheating, they had arranged happiness for themselves. Why should he not have his share?

The trouble was that five thousand dollars, converted to pounds, did not last Telford long. Alone in the big house with Beryl—albeit in his separate apartment—he was continually aware of her presence. She called on him to adjust the television picture or help move a table. Her manner was grotesquely flirtatious.

To escape her attentions, he avoided the house, feeding Stephanie nightly in restaurants. "You aren't working," she commented. "Where is all the money coming from?"

"Savings," he said. "Don't worry, I'm all right." Then he made a suggestion he'd been mulling over. Would Stephanie consider moving to Canada where his CBC future would be assured?

Stephanie would consider no such thing. Her intention was to move her career ahead in a straight line from Richmond to London's West End. There was no alternative.

Telford's financial situation went from bad to worse. He was selling an occasional article to *The Listener*, and once he picked up a fee for phoning in a few reports to a private Canadian station. But these sums were insignificant. With no income from the Corporation as long as he remained on this side of the Atlantic, Telford could see the day approaching when he would be stoney broke.

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He didn't want to approach Fergie again. But he made up his mind to do it as he walked home early on a frosty morning after the sweetest of all nights in Stephanie's arms. Her attraction for him was not fading; he was more committed to the relationship than ever.

Next day, he telephoned Montreal. Fergie did not seem all that surprised to hear from him. "You lasted longer than we expected," he said.

"I need money. I'm sorry. I hope to get reestablished—"

"Why do you imagine we should pay you again?"

"Because I can make things difficult for you." There it was—out at last. Blackmail was clearly implied.

"Difficult in what way?"

"You spirited money out of England. You've infringed the currency regulations."

"Believe me, there's no evidence. I was extremely careful. You'd have trouble proving anything."

"You faked your own death. That can't be legal."

"Rita forged a death certificate so that Beryl could inherit, I'll grant you that. Are you desperate enough to get her in trouble?"

"Your wife, then. I'll tell Beryl. She'll bring the two of you back to earth."

"Do what you think you must," Cruft said, and he did Telford a favor by terminating the expensive telephone call.

In the days that followed, Telford made a further effort to convince Stephanie she would learn to like living in Canada. If only he could persuade her to move back home with him he would be happy. "I'm telling you for the last time," she stated, erasing that possibility forever. "The English theater is London. Period. *J'y suis et j'y reste!*"

"That sounds like the French theater," he ventured. "Sounds like Montreal."

She did not laugh. The subject was well and truly closed.

Yet another avenue to survival was denied Telford a week later with the news from Yorkshire of Sebastian Cruft's unexpected death. The priest was on his way home from a visit to a parish family trying to cope with the problem of a runaway daughter. Crossing a normally quiet road at night, camouflaged in his black cassock, he was struck down by a speeding car. The only comfort Beryl Hees-Cruft could take with her on the desolate trip north was

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the realization that her son had died instantly. The burial took place, as Sebastian had ordained, in his own churchyard.

Within four days it was all over and Beryl had returned to Richmond.

Now Telford asked himself if he would have gone so far as to blackmail Beryl? Would he have said to her, "Support me here in England or I'll tell your son his father's living in sin with Rita Hathaway in Montreal"? Yes, he had been on the verge of doing that very thing.

Beryl was potting plants at a table by the side of the house when Telford emerged from his apartment in a destructive mood on an afternoon of alternating sunshine and shade. She must have read something in his eyes. "Is anything wrong?" she asked him.

"Nothing serious." He looked at her and saw the hickory face, the fringe of grey hair under the kerchief she had knotted on her head, and he thought, Why not fix Fergie? If he, Telford, was going to be forced home, leaving Stephanie here, then let Cruft come back and face his responsibilities. "Actually, there is. A while back when I was in Montreal, I had this incredible experience."

"Come in and have a cup of tea. Tell me all about it." She took his arm and drew him through the rose-framed doorway.

While the kettle whistled and Beryl made tea, Telford went through the whole improbable story. At the end, she remained calm. "I know," she said. "I agreed to let them go."

Telford was stunned. "But if you knew—"

"Sebastian didn't know. That was the agreement. Ferguson could fade away and die as long as my security was assured and Sebastian was spared the shock of knowing that his father was living with another woman. It doesn't matter any more." She sipped tea. "Poor Corey, you look shattered. You must have thought you could go on getting money from him."

"Don't tease me, Beryl. I'm in love with Stephanie—I can't tell you how much. I must stay in Richmond. But I can't earn my living here."

"That's the first time you've called me Beryl." She got up to carry her cup to the sink and paused behind his chair. "I have a suggestion."

He waited, knowing what was coming.

"I have plenty of money. More than enough for both of us. I'm lonelier than ever now that Sebastian is gone. Surely you'd prefer

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to move out of that cramped apartment into the main house with me." She paused, then went on. "I've no objections to your seeing Stephanie. You're a strong young man, full of love. There's no reason why you shouldn't continue living here with no money worries whatever. As long as you don't mind sharing . . ."

When Telford showed up at Stephanie's bedsitter that evening she was surprised that he immediately took a shower. Later, he seemed subdued. She had to work hard at enticing a response from him. It was as if, for him, the act of love had turned into a terrible duty.

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Lily had this recurring thought. It popped into her mind at the oddest times, and it puzzled her. Where had it come from? What did it mean? Lily was frustrated—and frightened . . .

THE UNBIDDEN THOUGHT

by BARBARA CRAWFORD

An obsessive thought that recurred at odd, unlikely moments. Waking from dream-free sleep. In the midst of listening to a symphony. While driving on the freeway. The words were always the same. *And then she brought the gun up.*

Lily always stopped the thought there, wondered why there was no accompanying image. She didn't know who the she was who brought the gun up, didn't know if it was a handgun or rifle. Oh, yes, she did know that. It was a handgun. Definitely.

Why she should have this recurring fragment of thought, Lily didn't know. She was afraid of guns. It must be, she reflected, because of the violence of the world that greeted her each day on the TV and in the newspapers. The ubiquitousness of guns. Every day someone was dying in the city streets. A constant of the times.

The thought had intruded into her peaceful morning coffee break again for no apparent reason. Here she was sitting in the kitchen by the window, warmed by the bright sun on her shoulders, thinking of how she would finish hemming the blue dress, idly refusing to think about the shaky world situation and the starving children whose faces peered out at her from the newspaper. *And then she brought the gun up.*

Lily stopped the thought there, and considered it. Why did it recur again and again? What did it mean? Was it some form of prescience? She shivered inwardly. It couldn't be something in her future. She didn't even own a gun. But though she could not visualize the person who brought the gun up, how did she know it was a handgun and not a rifle?

Lily didn't think she believed that anyone could foretell the future, though like everyone she had had an occasional *déjà vu*. And she

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wasn't subject to obsessive thoughts; she was doubtful about ESP. She liked her world tidy like her neat house and her orderly, methodical husband, Tim. He didn't like guns either, wouldn't have them in the house, and had forbidden their son Ronnie to own one. "Guns. They're for killing," Tim had said flatly to Ronnie when the boy had begged for a .22. "No way."

But that last mention of bringing a gun into the house had been five years ago, and Ronnie had accepted his father's edict. Ronnie didn't even live at home any more; he was off at college. So why did Lily's mind keep catching her unawares with the thought? And what made her so sure it was a handgun? Some kink in her mind? A line from some story she had read? She wasn't really frightened of the thought, she told herself. But it was unsettling.

It was not a likely thought for a woman like her whose dailiness consisted of peaceful, sedate activities—her church charities, her bridge games with her women friends, her housekeeping, her cooking dinner for Tim every evening of her life at five o'clock so it would be ready for him at six. She couldn't imagine even telling Tim about this tiny intrusive thought. Likely as not, he would dismiss it contemptuously as some of her woman's nonsense—that is, if he even heard her at all.

Nevertheless, because she had reflected on the thought, she began to wonder about guns. Somewhat timidly she asked her friend Nora whose husband she knew liked to go hunting in deer season, "How do you feel about Jerry's going hunting? I mean," she added delicately when she saw the surprise in Nora's faded blue eyes, "killing. You know, killing deer. Such pretty animals."

Nora laughed. "I don't care for venison, if that's what you mean, but it gets Jerry out of my hair for several weekends every fall."

"Oh," said Lily, disappointed. Nora had not understood her question, but she didn't pursue it.

She noticed, the next time she drove along Carlson Boulevard to the shopping plaza that there was a gunshop on the way, a quaint, rather Hansel-and-Gretel type of cottage which advertised a special exhibit of Old West guns. It looked too cosy a building, more like a tea shop, Lily thought. She brushed away the idea that she might go in and look at the exhibit. What possible interest could guns have for her?

And Tim's friend Mac, who was a psychologist, had made a fleeting

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reference on Saturday night at dinner to the gun as the great American phallic symbol. Lily had blushed at that. Surely her obsessive thought had nothing to do with sex. But she had looked rather sourly at Tim sitting placidly across the table inveighing against the gun lobby. He was saying, "This country's lost more leaders because of guns than . . ." Lily had thought that their sex life left a great deal to be desired. Was that why she was having the obtrusive thought?

Practically she decided that it was of no moment in her existence and so she would not think about it any more. She would be sensible. That was one virtue she knew she had though Tim did not credit her with it. He thought her too prone to sentimentality and illogical thinking. He did admire her cooking and her housekeeping.

Lily knew that if she wanted to stop thinking about something unpleasant, all she had to do was push the thought away, and it would not trouble her. That was what she did with the fact that Ronnie rarely came home for a visit any more, or that Tim was disgruntled over having lost substantially on the stock market, or with their lack of a sex life. Ronnie had his own life to live, Tim had always had his ups and downs with the market, and they had been married for 30 years. So Lily didn't allow herself to worry about these things. And they didn't trouble her. She would do the same with this nagging little thought. And it would go away.

Three days later, sitting at the bridge table in Nora's house, she noticed for the first time the highly polished gun cabinet which stood just beyond the living-room door in Jerry's study. That was odd, Lily thought, that she had sat in that room dozens of times and never noticed the gun cabinet before. Perhaps Jerry had just moved it there?

She didn't want to look at it—she was intent on her bridge hand, but it was not biddable. Obviously Sue and Ellen were going to get the contract. "Pass," she said automatically and her eyes came to focus on the cabinet. Four rifles stood inside. Why did Jerry need four rifles, she wondered. And though she was beginning her old trick of forbidding herself to think about such things, a further question intruded. Does Jerry have a handgun?

She couldn't see any from where she sat. Maybe in the drawer at the base of the cabinet. But no, Jerry wouldn't need a handgun to hunt deer. She stopped herself severely. Really, Lily, this is not like you. She was flustered when Sue said somewhat sharply, "It's your

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lead, Lily," and she didn't know what card to put down. From Nora's slight frown, Lily knew she hadn't made the right lead.

She hadn't had the thought for over a week now, but one afternoon when she was driving along Carlson Boulevard she saw a parking place in front of the gunshop, automatically pulled her car into it, and got out. Then the thought occurred. *And then she brought the gun up.* She stopped, embarrassed, and glanced furtively up and down the street. Really, this was too ridiculous. What was she thinking of to have stopped here to look at an exhibit of Old West guns?

She went hurriedly back into her car. It was that stupid sentence again. That was what had caused her to step so out of character. She told herself firmly that she was not supposed to have that thought again. Where then had it come from?

Mac and Shirley had invited them for dinner. Lily decided that if she could do it unobtrusively so that Tim wouldn't notice, she would ask Mac why unbidden thoughts popped up obsessively in some people's minds. She wouldn't mention her own unbidden thought.

But Mac confused her with a short lecture on the powers of the unconscious and was sidetracked onto the meaning of Freudian slips. Tim interrupted to bring up his assumption that the government should be expected to bail out Chrysler Motors. Lily went to the kitchen and offered to help Shirley. Later she was sulky when Tim wanted to leave at eleven o'clock. She had wanted another chance to ask Mac about obsessive thoughts.

Though she usually acquiesced in the evenings to Tim's choice of a TV show—he preferred talk shows on the educational channel—she switched several times the next week when he was called to the telephone to police action series, watching closely for a scene in which a woman would aim a revolver; but such a scene didn't happen.

Lily reasoned that if she saw such a scene it would prove to be a *déjà vu*, and then her obsessive thought would go away. Her switching of channels irritated Tim.

"What the hell's gotten into you?" he grumbled. "You never watch junk like this."

Lily said nothing and thought obstinately: You mean *you* never watch junk like this. A small thought followed. We always watch

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what you want. But that was unworthy of her, Lily knew. Tim was right. The violence on TV. That was junk.

The next day Lily was in the coffee shop on Solano Avenue, killing fifteen minutes before her haircutting appointment, when a young policeman walked in. He was a stocky man with a broad face that reminded her somewhat of Tim's, but the resemblance only flickered at her. Her eyes were drawn to the brown-leather holster on his hip. It bulged there like some unseemly physical deformity. It was enormous. It was all Lily could do to withdraw her gaze.

She told herself she was horrified at her proximity to the policeman's handgun. She shuddered a little. Guns kill, she thought. And hoped no one would force the policeman to use it while she sat there so near to him. A robber? She looked anxiously at the door of the shop, imagining herself caught in a hail of bullets. She imagined herself bleeding, dying. What would Tim think of that? It was all she could do to gather herself together, trembling, and walk to the cashier. There the policeman inadvertently brushed against her. Lily shrank back. His holster had touched her. She felt a dreadful chill sweep over her body.

While she had coffee the following day in Nora's living room, the phone rang and Nora went into the kitchen. Without hesitation Lily got up and walked into Jerry's study. She peered into the gun cabinet, fascinated in spite of herself by the smooth perfection of the four rifles. She looked down at the bottom of the cabinet and stood very still. Lying there was a brown-leather holster like the policeman's. A handgun, Lily thought. So Jerry has a handgun.

Her next thought frightened her. Was the cabinet locked? She didn't stop her fingers as they stealthily swung the glass door open. She reached down and touched the holster. From the kitchen she heard Nora's voice. Lily wanted to see the handgun, to touch it. But then she heard Nora saying, "Goodbye."

Swiftly Lily stood up and closed the cabinet. She wandered nervously over to a bookcase. "Oh, there you are," said Nora. "That was Shirley. They can't make it this Friday so that means we'll be just six for dinner."

On her way home Lily felt a sudden drenching of perspiration; she felt faint. She pictured herself reaching into Jerry's gun cabinet. What in the world had come over her? Was she losing her mind? She hated guns, she told herself. She was afraid of them. As she let

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herself into her neat kitchen and began to get out the roast for dinner, a question fretted the edges of her mind. She tried to ignore it, and at last stopped short in the middle of her wax-free floor and said sharply aloud, "Lily Altman, you're going crazy." Why else would she wonder whether Jerry kept his guns loaded?

That Friday night Tim, as usual, upbraided her for taking so long to get ready to go to the dinner party at Nora's. Tim hated to be late. "I'm sorry," Lily said timidly. Nevertheless she took an exceptionally long time putting on her makeup, while she could hear Tim muttering angrily in the front hall. Lily finally went out to him as if in a reverie. She did not seem to know what she was doing as she got into the car next to him, did not even hear his stiff lecture on punctuality.

The only regret she had at the dinner party was that Shirley and Mac could not be there. There was something important she needed to ask Mac. She couldn't quite remember what it was. But it was important. She should try to remember. She scarcely heard Tim's voice as he argued with Jerry over selling—what was it, wheat?—to the Russians. After a while she excused herself to go to the powder room. She lingered there a long time staring at her feverish gray eyes in the mirror. For some strange reason she felt very excited. The wine, she thought. I've had too much wine.

When she came out, she walked into Jerry's study. The room was dark but she went unerringly to the gun cabinet, opened it, and with sure, practised fingers slipped the handgun out of the holster. It lay cold and smooth in her hand. It felt comfortable there, as if it were meant for her. She caressed it with her left hand. It felt smooth as silk. She liked the feel of it.

Slowly she turned around and went out of the study into the living room and stopped midway. From here she could see into the dining room. Tim's back was to her; she could hear his voice raised angrily. Something about the C.I.A., but she didn't pay attention. She felt a tremulous rush of giddiness. It was a good feeling. *And then she brought the gun up.*

"Q"

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a *NEW* Pierre Chambrun story by

HUGH PENTECOST

The Beaumont is New York City's top luxury hotel, and one of the great hotels of the world. The manager of the Beaumont is Pierre Chambrun, the hard but just taskmaster who runs his enclave with the precision of a Swiss watch. Within this self-contained principality—with its own shops, restaurants, and security system—Chambrun rules, as circumstances dictate, with a gloved hand or a hand of steel. And as circumstances dictate, Chambrun solves problems as a detective, judge, jury, or as an avenger. This time the Beaumont is afflicted with the most vicious of contemporary violences . . .

PIERRE CHAMBRUN'S DILEMMA

by HUGH PENTECOST

After ten years as public-relations director for the Beaumont, New York's top luxury hotel, I tell myself that I have come to know Pierre Chambrun, the Beaumont's legendary manager, better than anyone else on the staff. There is, of course, Betsy Ruysdale, his fabulous secretary, who appears able to read his mind in advance, but there are some of us who think she may be much closer to him than just a member of his efficient crew. That is another story, a secret that only Chambrun and Betsy could reveal.

Chambrun is king of his world. The Beaumont is like a city within a city, with its own security force, hospital, shops, restaurants, bars, and living quarters for a thousand people. Chambrun knows everything there is to know about its operation—exactly what is happening in every nook and cranny of his elegant establishment almost

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moment to moment. The difference between the Beaumont and an ordinary town is that except for a few people who own cooperative apartments on the upper floors, the residents are transient, coming and going from all over the world. It is a home-away-from-home of many diplomats involved in the work of the United Nations. Movie stars, social luminaries from London, Paris, or Monaco pass in and out.

In addition, Chambrun knows all there is to know about every guest—their credit ratings, their love lives, their political affiliation, their habits, good and bad. It might have embarrassed some of them to know how much intimate information we had about them. The information wasn't difficult to collect with an efficient front office, with a security service and housekeeping staff, with Maitre d's, bartenders, and sharp and observant bellmen.

It might have surprised the staff even more to know how much Chambrun knew about those who worked for him, their home lives, their children, their special problems. This was in no way a method of checking up on employees for security reasons. It was his way of being a friend. It equipped him to offer help before anyone had to ask him for it. These people, hundreds of them, were his family. It was his concern for one of his "family" that projected Chambrun, one summer day, into a terrorist plot to commit a murder that threatened to shake the power centers of the world.

General Achmed Hassan, the Mid-Eastern diplomat, had come to New York for negotiations at the United Nations. He came from an area dominated by terror and confusion. His goal was some kind of peaceful solution of the problems of oil and Western economy. His enemies—fanatics for the most part—were as numerous as his friends and supporters. Every moment of his life was threatened by terrorists who would gladly assassinate him given an inch in which to maneuver.

I can't tell you much about the outside forces set up to protect General Hassan. I suppose the FBI, the CIA, and certainly the New York Police, covered every move he made in the city and at the UN. They had in the past protected Sadat, a friend, and Castro, an enemy, with calm efficiency. Protecting the General in the Beaumont without turning the place into an armed fortress that would frighten its regular guests was Chambrun's job, and Jerry Dodd's, our security chief, and mine, and every other employee of the hotel.

The General had four personal bodyguards who shared his suite on the 21st floor. Jerry Dodd's men patrolled the hallways. I, Mark

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Haskell, kept the press away. When times came for the General to leave the building, an elevator was reserved for his private use which took him to the basement garage where a car, surrounded by police, waited to take him to the UN.

The General had all his meals in 21A. The food was prepared by the General's own special chef, watched over by an FBI man. The meals were served by a waiter, chosen by Chambrun, who had been with the Beaumont for more than twenty years. "I would trust my own life to Luigi Cantora," I heard Chambrun say when he selected the waiter to serve the General. "And I care quite a bit more for myself than I do for our guest."

On the summer day in question Luigi Cantora did not report for work. It was the first time in twenty years he didn't report for work. He didn't call in sick. He just didn't show. Chambrun replaced him, but that wasn't good enough for him. There was something wrong with a member of his "family." He could have sent me, or one of Dodd's men, or Betsy Ruysdale, to check. He went himself. Luigi was his friend.

Not long ago a movie company was considering making a film out of one of the stories I've written about Pierre Chambrun. I was asked if I could suggest an actor who would be right for the role. Unfortunately the actor who would have been perfect was not available, the late Claude Rains. Short and stocky, like Chambrun, but moving with the grace of a dancer. Pouches under eyes that could be bright with humor, dark with anger, or cold as a hanging judge's. A touch of vanity shows in his expensive and impeccable taste in clothes. When he goes out on the streets of the city he carries a blackthorn walking stick. Walking sticks have gone out of style until recently, when men have started to think again about self-protection in a violent city. Chambrun is, I suppose, in his late fifties, but I wouldn't recommend tangling with him, not when he is armed with his blackthorn. In what he calls "the dark days," the time of the occupation of Paris by the Nazis, he had, in his late teens, learned all the arts of head-on confrontation.

That summer day Chambrun walked east toward a small building near the river where Luigi Cantora lived. Occasionally people would turn to look at him, his hat worn at a rakish angle, and swinging his stick. He was actually headed for a friend in trouble.

Chambrun knew things that morning about Luigi Cantora that I didn't know. Luigi was a dark Italian in his early sixties, with a

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deeply lined face; he was stooped a little with the years. His wife, Serafina, was twenty years his junior. Their only son had been killed in Vietnam. They were close, Luigi and Serafina, dependent on each other to survive their grief. If Luigi was too ill to go to work, Serafina would have called Chambrun, knowing that Luigi had a special job serving General Hassan. The only explanation Chambrun could think of for Luigi's not calling was that something had happened to Serafina—an accident, a sudden severe illness. Luigi would not act responsibly if something had happened to his beloved wife.

Chambrun knocked on the door of the Cantora apartment. There was no answer.

He rapped sharply with the knob of his blackthorn stick. Still no answer. Then he called out.

"Luigi! It's Pierre Chambrun!"

After a moment there was a sound from inside, the turning of the lock, and Luigi opened the door. He looked ravaged.

"Oh, my God, Mr. Chambrun," he said.

He stood aside and Chambrun walked into the neat little living room, so perfectly cared for by Serafina.

"What has happened to Serafina, Luigi?" Chambrun asked. "I know something has happened to her or you would have called in."

"Oh, my God, Mr. Chambrun!"

"Tell me, Luigi. I'm your friend. I want to help you if I can."

The old Italian turned away and his body convulsed with sobs. "You cannot help! There is no way to help me."

"*Tell me what has happened, Luigi!*"

"The terrorists have her!"

"What terrorists? What are you talking about?"

"The enemies of General Hassan," Luigi said. "They have taken her to be a hostage."

"Stop blubbering and tell me! How can I help you if I don't know what has happened?"

Luigi turned back. "I must help them commit a murder or they will kill Serafina."

"How on earth are you supposed to help them commit a murder?"

Luigi was silent.

"You must tell me," Chambrun said. "I am your friend. I am Serafina's friend. You know that."

"I have been warned not to go to the police, not to go to the FBI, not to go to you."

"You haven't come to me, I have come to you," Chambrun said.

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"They will know you are here, Mr. Chambrun. They are watching. They will think I've sent for you to help me. They may already have—have dealt with Serafina. You couldn't know, but your coming here may have cost her her life!"

I can imagine how that jolted Chambrun, but I doubt he showed it in any way.

"If you had to commit a murder to save her, why are you sitting here doing nothing?" he asked Luigi.

"I couldn't! I couldn't move! I was unable, like a man who has suffered a stroke. But it must be tomorrow morning or—or else. They have been in touch with me again. I—I have a last chance."

"To kill General Hassan?"

"To make certain he dies."

"How?"

"If I tell you, and you prevent it—"

"I promise you, Luigi, I will do nothing to risk Serafina's life. How are you supposed to make certain the General dies?"

Luigi turned away, his face working. "They cannot get to the General directly," he said. "There are his bodyguards, there are Jerry Dodd's men, there are FBI agents in the hotel. He is thoroughly protected from all ordinary violence. But I—I take him his food and drink."

"Poison?" Chambrun asked.

Luigi nodded.

"Impossible," Chambrun said. "He has his own trusted chef. The chef is watched, in all stages of his preparations, by an FBI agent."

"They know that," Luigi said. "There is one weak link in all the protection they've set up, Mr. Chambrun. I take the food wagon up from the kitchens, on the service elevator, to the rear door of the General's suite. I am not watched because you selected me, I am to be trusted. Tomorrow morning, when I take up the breakfast wagon on the service elevator, I will be intercepted somewhere between the kitchens and the twenty-first floor. Someone will poison the food and I will go on with it—and serve it."

"And if you sound an alarm?"

"For God's sake, Mr. Chambrun, they have Serafina! If a dozen generals have to die I would save her first. Before you came I made up my mind. I will go through with it. Now you will try to stop me!"

I can visualize Chambrun taking a flat Egyptian cigarette from his silver case, his eyes narrowed against the smoke as he lit it.

"I will not try to stop you, Luigi," he said. "You will do exactly

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what the assassins have ordered you to do. What I do—well, that is something else again."

"It is a very neat dilemma," Chambrun said. He was sitting behind the carved Florentine desk in his plush office on the Beaumont's second floor. The blue-period Picasso looked down at him from the opposite wall with triangular eyes. Jerry Dodd and Betsy Ruysdale and I were with him, the three people I think he trusts implicitly. "We prevent Luigi from delivering a poisoned breakfast to the General and Serafina dies. We don't prevent him and the General dies."

"You haven't any choice," Jerry Dodd said. He is a dark, wiry little man, intense, expert at his security job. "You have to protect the General."

"I have to protect Serafina," Chambrun said. "She is my friend's wife. I've promised him not to endanger her."

"You have to make a choice, Pierre," Miss Ruysdale said.

Chambrun smiled at Miss Ruysdale, a sly, almost mischievous smile. "I know, and I have made a choice," he said. "I plan to save them both."

"You have no idea where Serafina Cantora is being held," Jerry Dodd objected. "You have no way to find her."

"So I will have to find a way, won't I?" Chambrun replied.

"Do I notify my people and the FBI that we are expecting trouble?"

Chambrun's smile vanished. "You don't mention any of this to a single living soul," he said.

"You're playing some kind of fancy game with human lives," Jerry said. He always has the guts to stand up to Chambrun.

"Only a fancy game can save them both," Chambrun said. "What I want from you, Jerry, is to tighten your protection of the General, don't let anyone become complacent. But I don't want you to change the routine by a hair—no sudden surveillance of the service elevator, no watchful eye on Luigi. What I have told you is as sacred and secret as if you were priests in the confessional."

"Just don't blame me if we mess up on the General in some way," Jerry said. "Is that all, boss?"

"That's all," Chambrun said. "The zero hour isn't until tomorrow's breakfast."

Jerry took off, obviously not convinced that Chambrun was making sense. There was, however, no doubt he would carry out his orders to the letter. When the day comes that we can't follow The Man, blindly, our world will have collapsed.

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"You have appointments," Betsy Ruysdale reminded Chambrun when Jerry was gone.

"I'll keep them," Chambrun said. "Remember, Ruysdale"—he never calls her by her first name, just "Ruysdale"—"nothing is to change. All routines as usual—until tomorrow's breakfast."

Ruysdale nodded and took off for her private office.

"What can I do to be useful?" I asked Chambrun.

He sat very still for a moment, staring down at a blank pad on his desk top. Then he looked up at me. "If I muff this, Mark, there won't be much flavor to living."

I didn't say anything.

"The General's breakfast is served at eight thirty," he said. "I want you here with me at eight o'clock."

"Right."

"I may need you very urgently then, Mark. Meanwhile, today, don't let the press and media people develop any kind of special or sudden interest in the General. Invent something, if necessary, to keep them looking somewhere else. The Queen of England may be coming to stay with us; Greta Garbo is planning a party to announce her return to the screen. Anything to keep them looking away from the General."

"Count on it."

"You think I'm out of my mind, Mark?"

"No, but I don't know what's going on in it—in your mind."

"It's quite simple," he said. "I hope to save two lives."

If it had been anyone but Chambrun, I might have protested, loud and long. No individual has the right to play games with life and death. The General, forewarned, could be kept perfectly safe. He was surrounded by an army of trained people. Serafina Cantora was an unfortunate victim of fanatical evil. All hostages are such victims. Someone playing games with the situation was running intolerable risks.

But not Chambrun. If any man could assess the odds for success and against failure, that man was Chambrun. He had lived and succeeded all his life by taking calculated risks.

I have to tell you that I went through the next hours—the rest of that morning, the afternoon, and a long evening—under a kind of tension I wouldn't have believed. The Beaumont seemed to operate with its usual Swiss-watch efficiency, but for me violence seemed to be waiting around every corner. We all live with violence but for

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me, that day, it was pinpointed, focused on the Beaumont.

The big trouble was expected tomorrow morning, but somehow I expected it might erupt long before that. I had an ear to the ground. I knew when the General left for the UN about ten in the morning. I knew when he returned about six in the afternoon. I knew when the changing of the guard took place, when a new group of FBI agents took over, when Jerry Dodd's crew changed.

The General lived through the day without incident. The newspaper and other media people had shown no interest in him. I was exhausted when I went to my apartment on the second floor and fell into bed, alerting the switchboard to call me at six thirty in the morning. I wouldn't have believed it possible, but I slept as though I'd been slugged.

I must have jumped three feet clear of the bed when the phone rang. It was only the operator telling me it was time to get moving. The sun was streaming through my windows. This was the day when one of two people was scheduled to die, and both of them might.

Chambrun was already in his office when I got there at a quarter to eight, fifteen minutes ahead of the time I'd been ordered to report. He was wearing a light gray tropical worsted suit with a little white flower in the buttonhole. He looked as if he'd slept like a baby; he was refreshed, ready for anything. I knew from my shaving mirror that I looked as if I'd been on an all-night binge.

"We are sharing the breakfast hour with the General," Chambrun informed me.

With murder scheduled for eight thirty, I told myself.

We went to the 21st floor and Chambrun rang the bell to the General's suite. The door was promptly opened by one of the dark-faced bodyguards.

We were led into the luxurious living room where General Hassan was already at work at his desk. He got up from his chair to greet us, a handsome man with the brilliant smile of a professional public figure, a neatly trimmed beard and mustache, and dark eyes, bright with pleasure.

"It is a delight to see you, Mr. Chambrun," he said.

The General wasn't alone. The guard who had admitted us stood by the door to the vestibule. Another was at the opening of the corridor that led to the bedrooms. A third, I guessed, was at the rear of the suite waiting for Luigi Cantora to arrive with the breakfast wagon.

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"It's rather early in the day, General, but there seemed to be no other time to fit myself into your busy schedule," Chambrun said. "Have you met Mark Haskell, our public-relations director?"

The General's handshake was firm and friendly. "Like everything else in this establishment, Mr. Chambrun, the machinery turns soundlessly. Mr. Haskell has kept me well protected from the press. Please sit down. You will share coffee with me when it comes. It should be here any moment. And now, what can I do for you, Mr. Chambrun?"

"I just wanted to make certain everything is as you wish it to be," Chambrun said. "That you are satisfied with the routines, that the service is satisfactory."

"My own people in my own palace could not be more perfect," the General said. "Ah, here is Luigi with the breakfast."

Luigi Cantora looked like a man about to face a firing squad as he wheeled in the breakfast wagon, followed by a guard. When Luigi saw Chambrun, his eyes bulged like marbles.

"We missed you yesterday, Luigi," the General said.

"My—my wife was ill, sir," Luigi muttered.

"I trust she is feeling much better today," the General said.

"Thank you, sir."

Luigi wheeled the breakfast wagon into place in front of the General. Luigi's hands were obviously shaking as he shifted some of the silver-covered plates and moved the silver coffee pot into position. I felt the inside of my mouth go painfully dry. Almost certainly, from Luigi's panicked appearance, death was lurking there for the General.

The General was evidently in high good humor.

"I think you will find extra coffee cups in the pantry, Luigi," he said. "Please fetch two for Mr. Chambrun and Mr. Haskell."

Luigi seemed frozen where he stood.

"Luigi—" Chambrun said, very quietly.

The coffee! It had to be the coffee! The old waiter made a despairing sound, turned, and stumbled out of the room. The General filled the one coffee cup on the wagon with a flourish, picked up the cup, and held it out toward Chambrun.

"For you, my friend," he said.

Chambrun's face looked carved out of stone. He didn't move in his chair. One of the guards took a quick step forward, apparently to pass the cup. He stumbled as he reached the breakfast wagon, reached out to prevent himself from falling, sent the coffee cup

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flying, spilling most of the contents on the front of Chambrun's immaculate summer suit. The guard's other hand overturned the coffee pot on the wagon.

Both Chambrun and the General were suddenly standing.

"How could you be so clumsy, Abdul?" the General said sharply.

The guard muttered something apologetic in a language I didn't understand. He was blotting at Chambrun's stained suit with a napkin. Then he turned to the breakfast wagon to work on the coffee spill there. I glanced past him and saw Luigi in the entrance to the pantry, clinging to the door jamb like a man whose legs had turned to gelatin. Chambrun spoke quietly to the old waiter.

"Help clean up the mess, Luigi, and bring General Hassan fresh cloth and napkins—and a fresh pot of coffee," Chambrun said.

Luigi nodded and began puttering, almost aimlessly.

"I'm deeply sorry for Abdul's awkwardness, Mr. Chambrun," the General said. "I trust you will wait for fresh coffee."

"I'm afraid not, General," Chambrun said. "I have a rather busy schedule this morning, and I'll have to change into a more presentable suit of clothes."

"Another time," the General suggested.

"It will be a pleasure, General."

Out in the hall I grabbed Chambrun's arm. "That was no accident," I said. "You'd forewarned them!"

He gave me an odd, cold look. "I agree with you, Mark. It was not an accident. But I assure you, I've talked to no one about this but Luigi, you, Jerry Dodd, and Ruysdale."

"Then why—"

"If I had taken a swallow of that coffee and dropped dead on the spot," Chambrun said, "it would have closed off the only avenue they have for getting at the General. As it is, tomorrow is another day."

"And you won't be there for breakfast tomorrow."

"If I have to be," Chambrun said, "it's 'goodbye, Serafina'."

It was pretty hard to concentrate on the routines of the day. Chambrun, I knew, would never tell me anything but the truth. He hadn't warned the General or his guards about a planned assassination by poison. That meant there was treachery within the ranks of the General's close and personal protectors—specifically, the man called Abdul. One rotten apple in the barrel. If the plan to use Luigi, forced to cooperate out of fear for his wife, was to be tried again it would

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have to be delayed until tomorrow's breakfast.

The General would have his lunch at the UN, and who could know where he might dine. Our unexpected presence this morning had aborted the plan, but Abdul—he must have thought very cleverly—had saved them a second chance. Serafina Cantora was still a hostage, and the terrified Luigi would continue to cooperate. Abdul and his co-conspirators must have felt certain of that. We, on our side, had a day and a night, but what could we do with that time?

A little after ten o'clock that morning I was in my office, down the hall from Chambrun's, when I got a call from The Man.

"I need your help, Mark," he said.

"Anything you say."

"Meet me at the elevator. We're going places."

Two or three minutes later we met. He was wearing his rakish hat and carrying his blackthorn walking stick. Apparently we were going somewhere outside the hotel.

Chambrun pressed the down button and we descended to the garage in the basement of the hotel. He didn't explain anything until we reached his own private Mercedes which was waiting for us with Jerry Dodd at the wheel. Chambrun got in up front with Jerry. He turned to me in the back seat as the car started up the ramp.

"I figured Abdul would have to report to his pals," he said. "So I alerted Jerry. Abdul wouldn't, I thought, make an outside call through the hotel switchboard. The General's guards change when he leaves the hotel for the UN."

"The boss was right," Jerry said, as he maneuvered the car out into the city traffic. "The first place Abdul went when he was relieved was to a pay phone in the lobby. I was on his heels. I could see him dial a number. He spoke, excited, in a language I couldn't understand. But I checked with a chum at the phone company and got an address for the number he'd called. About ten blocks away on the Upper East Side."

"That's where we're going," Chambrun said.

"To do what?" I asked.

"Not to whistle Dixie!" Jerry said.

Our target turned out to be a dilapidated brownstone not far from the river. Jerry parked the Mercedes about a block from the house he indicated.

"Let me case the joint," he said, and took off.

We waited for what seemed an interminable length of time. Then Chambrun sat up straight. On the front steps of the house down the

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block we saw Jerry. He'd removed his suit coat and he was, of all things, industriously sweeping the front steps of the house.

We left the car and walked briskly down the block to the house. The front door stood open behind the sweeping Jerry.

"The janitor was a sucker for a ten spot," he said. "Foreigners have rented the rear apartment on the first floor." He grinned at Chambrun. "I have the passkey."

We went into the dark hallway and down the corridor to the rear. Jerry signaled us for silence. He slipped a key noiselessly into the lock, again indicating we should stay behind him. He turned the key and was instantly three steps into the room beyond.

"A leak in the bathroom," we heard him say. "I thought you guys were out."

Chambrun pushed forward, I right behind him. Two dark-skinned men faced us, startled by our sudden appearance.

"Chambrun!" one of them said. They knew The Man by sight. They had probably scouted the Beaumont thoroughly before they'd put their murder scheme into action.

"I assume Mrs. Cantora is in the back bedroom," Chambrun said, coldly. "Will you be good enough to bring her out here, Mark?"

I must have looked like a sleepwalker as I started for the far door. One of the terrorists recovered and took a quick step to block the way. There was a gun pointed straight at my chest.

Chambrun's heavy blackthorn stick moved in a short arc. There was a sound like splintering kindling, the gun went hurtling across the room, and the terrorist screamed and went down to his knees, cradling his shattered arm. The second man was down, with Jerry Dodd sitting on his chest, a gun pressed against the terrorist's forehead.

As if he were taking a stroll in the park, Chambrun stepped over the man he'd struck and went into the back room. A moment later I heard a woman's voice, frightened but relieved. She had been tied to a chair, a gag in her mouth, Chambrun told us later.

He reappeared, his arm around Luigi Cantora's beloved Serafina. "It's all right, Serafina," Chambrun said gently. "It's all over. I'll take you to Luigi. He'll be overjoyed to see you." He turned to me. "You can call the police to take care of these scum, Mark," he said. And then to Jerry, "Get in touch with General Hassan at the United Nations. He may want to disinfect his private army." He gave Serafina a little hug. "We must be going, my dear. I have a hotel to run."

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a *NEW* Captain Leopold story by

EDWARD D. HOCH

With what's happening in the gold and silver markets these days, people are selling their old coins, their jewelry, and even some of their heirlooms. Do you have an antique bracelet or silver candlesticks you want to sell? They may be worth more than their sentimental memories. So visit the Silver Foxes—they pay top dollar for old silver . . . a puzzler for Captain Leopold . . .

CAPTAIN LEOPOLD AND THE SILVER FOXES

by EDWARD D. HOCH

They came in on the afternoon plane from Minneapolis, arriving during a chill November rain that made them glad they'd brought warm clothes. Both of them were tall and dark, around 30, and with identical neatly trimmed mustaches that made them look like brothers. Danny O'Bern, who was meeting them at the airport, thought they looked like a couple of hit men for the mob.

"Hello," he said, extending his hand. "I'm O'Bern. You hired me through Northeast Security."

The man on the left smiled. "Dave Bailey. This is my partner, Mike Fox."

"Then there really is a Silver Fox!" O'Bern said with a chuckle.

The second man joined in with a mild chuckle but his eyes seemed alert, sizing up Danny O'Bern. "My father started the business," he explained. "I'm just learning the ropes."

They waited for the bags to be unloaded and O'Bern kept up the conversation. "Where'd you come from—Milwaukee?"

"Minneapolis."

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"How was the weather there?"

The first man, Bailey, answered. "Better than here—at least the sun was shining."

O'Bern drove them into town, and on the way Dave Bailey told him about the Silver Foxes. "We have teams that travel around the country, spending a week or two in each city. We usually set up in a downtown hotel, or in a motel out near the airport—someplace where it's easy for people to reach us. We run a full-page or two-page ad in the local newspapers, offering to buy coins, jewelry, diamonds, what-have-you. It's as simple as that."

"Is it honest?" O'Bern wanted to know.

"Perfectly honest. We pay nine times face value for all-silver coins, mainly those minted before 1965. And we pay three times face value for halves minted between 1965 and 1969 when the government cut the amount of silver. Silver dollars bring even more, depending on the date."

"There are collectors for those things?"

"Sure, there are collectors," Dave Bailey replied. "But they never see these coins. We melt them down for the silver content. With the price of silver today a quarter from before 1965 is worth more than $2.50."

"I thought it was illegal to melt down coins."

"It used to be, but they changed the law. Couldn't enforce it anyhow. But we buy lots of things besides coins—old jewelry, especially gold, and precious stones. We pay spot cash for everything, unless the sellers request a check. So we have maybe twenty thousand dollars in cash in the hotel room when we open each morning. That's where you come in."

"You need an armed guard."

"Right. You just sort of stand behind us, wearing your gun. Answer the phone when it rings, keep order in case the room gets too crowded. Okay?"

"Sure. Sounds easy enough," Danny O'Bern said.

"If anyone tries to knock us over, it would probably be in the morning," Bailey added.

His partner, Mike Fox, chuckled. "They come in before closing, they'll have a hundred pounds of coins to cart away."

"Have you had any trouble in other cities?"

"Not really," Fox replied. "Last month in St. Louis a couple of young toughs made a grab for the cash box, but our guard flattened one of them with his fist and the other ran away empty-handed."

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Dave Bailey nodded. "We get a lot of older, retired people who've been saving coins in piggy banks for years. It's important to be friendly with them, joke a bit."

"I understand."

"Good." Bailey's face relaxed into a grin. "I think we'll get along just fine this week."

Danny O'Bern helped them check in at the Riverside Plaza Hotel downtown. They took two connecting rooms on the tenth floor—one for sleeping and the other, set up with two desks and chairs, for the business at hand. "Near the elevators," Bailey told the room clerk, "so's people can find us."

O'Bern was at the hotel in uniform early the next morning. He accompanied Mike Fox to the bank across the street, past a masked and caped man on the sidewalk passing out fliers. "What's all that?" Fox asked.

"Downtown promotion. They've got people dressed as storybook characters passing out discount coupons for the stores. I think he's supposed to be Zorro or somebody like that."

"Then it's a good week for us to be in town. There should be more people coming downtown." At the bank the young man cashed a draft for $20,000 in small bills.

"What happens if you run out of money?" O'Bern asked as they recrossed the street to the hotel.

"My uncle wires us more."

"I thought your father had the business."

"He started it, but he died in that Chicago plane crash last year. Uncle Ralph runs things now." As they entered the hotel he asked, "How's the night life here? Any girls?"

"I used to be a cop. We were always picking up streetwalkers around the hotel at convention time."

"I was thinking more of a singles bar. You know, pick up a girl and bring her back to the hotel."

"What about your partner?"

"Dave's got a wife and kids. He doesn't play around."

"You might try the hotel bar in the evening. A lot of secretaries from the office buildings come in there for drinks."

"Thanks."

Upstairs, Bailey had taped their newspaper ad to the door: *The Silver Foxes Are Back, Sniffing Out Your Silver and Gold! Top Dollar for Pre-1970 Coins!* O'Bern read it and wondered how many customers it would bring in.

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The results surprised him, though the two young men seemed to take the crowd in stride. From the moment their office opened at eleven that morning, the room was crowded. O'Bern sent down for coffee and sandwiches while they worked through the lunch hour and the dinner hour that evening. Most of the people who came to the room were older—retired couples or women who'd brought in their hoards of coins. Half dollars and silver dollars were the most popular, though one man came in with a sack of all-silver quarters. A teenage girl appeared with her boy friend and announced that she'd found a single silver dime in the cash register at work. Mike Fox paid her 90 cents for it and tossed it into the metal box where the small coins were stored. They bought everything except pennies, though nickels were not as valuable as the silver coins and brought only seven cents.

Danny O'Bern noticed that Bailey did not even bother to count large quantities of quarters or halves. He would accept the seller's figure on the quantity and merely turn them over in his hands, searching for the telltale sandwich of copper in the newer coins. If all were pure silver he paid the seller on the spot, often rounding off the figure on large purchases. "Let's see now, that comes to $157.75. Suppose we make it $160 even. That okay? Fine! Be sure to tell your friends about us. We'll be here all week."

The first two days passed like that, routinely and without problems. One woman brought in a diamond ring that Bailey appraised at $6000. She was paid by check, but everyone else accepted cash, often in amounts of several hundred dollars. They had only to sign their name on a list of sellers, next to the amount they were paid.

On Wednesday morning Danny O'Bern arrived at the usual time and walked across the street to the bank with Mike Fox. "How are the girls?" he asked.

Fox gave a chuckle. "The one I picked up last night was a honey!"

"So you approve of our city."

"I've been in worse, believe me."

There were people in line before eleven o'clock, and O'Bern tried to shepherd them into the room, arranging them in some sort of line on a sofa and some chairs. Most of them were elderly, but one—the second in line—was a rough-looking middle-aged man wearing a raincoat and carrying a briefcase. Mike Fox took the first customer, so the man with the briefcase seated himself at Dave Bailey's desk.

"What have you got for us?" Bailey asked.

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"Some coins," the man answered, opening the briefcase and reaching inside. O'Bern saw his hand come out holding a snubnosed revolver. "Everybody freeze!" the man shouted.

Bailey's hands remained above the table. "What is this?"

"No talking. Give me all the bills! Quick—into the briefcase!" Bailey started to rise and the gunman said, "No, you stay put! The other one gets the money." He motioned to Mike Fox, casting only a glance toward where O'Bern stood frozen into inaction.

There were seven other people in the room, all women or elderly men. One woman started sobbing softly in terror but the others didn't speak or move. Finally Danny O'Bern spoke. "You can't get away with this," he said, sounding in his own ears like a cop in some second-rate TV movie.

"We'll see. Just don't go for your gun, mister." He was standing now with his back to the wall, covering Fox while he moved for the money but keeping watch on the others as well. "Somebody close that door," he ordered. "We've got a full house already."

Mike Fox scooped up the money in two big handfuls and carried it over to the briefcase. He hesitated, then dropped it inside. The gunman closed the case and tucked it under his left arm. He started edging along the wall toward the door. "Everyone out of my way!"

Then one of the women in his path let out a cry of fright. He started to swing the revolver toward her, but only for an instant. Before anyone knew what was happening he turned it quickly back toward Mike Fox and fired two shots. The bullets hit Fox in the center of the chest, toppling him back against the wall.

Danny O'Bern had his gun out now, but it was too late. The gunman went out the door amid the terrified screams of the onlookers. Dave Bailey was at Fox's side, kneeling beside him as he tried to stem the flow of blood. "Call an ambulance!" he shouted.

But both of them knew it was too late.

Less than an hour later Captain Leopold surveyed the hotel room with displeasure. It was a simple holdup and there was no reaosn why this young man Mike Fox should have been killed. As a rule, holdup men didn't shoot unless they were threatened, and the testimony of the witnesses agreed that Fox had made no threatening gesture.

The police photographers were just finishing up when Lieutenant Fletcher came in from the next room. "I got their names and addresses and sent everyone home," he said. "Everyone except Danny

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O'Bern and that fellow Bailey. You want to talk to them?"

"Yeah." Leopold followed him into the next room where O'Bern was seated on the bed next to a mustached young man. "What happened, Danny?" he asked quietly.

"Good to see you, Captain," O'Bern said, standing to shake hands. He'd been a good cop till he started drinking and got himself booted off the force. Leopold could sympathize with the drinking problem—O'Bern had lost his wife after she had had a long illness and then watched his only daughter try for an acting career in New York and end up a suicide in a seedy Manhattan hotel. But he could also sympathize with the police commissioner's ruling that a drunken cop was a bad cop.

Danny O'Bern had gained weight since Leopold last saw him, especially around the middle, and he looked as if he might still be drinking. The job with Northeast Security certainly wasn't a demanding one, though this morning it had demanded a bit more than Danny was able to give.

"What happened?" Leopold asked again.

"Guy comes in with a briefcase and pulls out a .38 revolver before I know what's happening, Captain. With the room full of hysterical old ladies I couldn't risk drawing my weapon."

"How did Fox get killed?"

"It was crazy. The guy in the raincoat was backing out with the money when all of a sudden he swung the gun back on Fox and shot him twice in the chest."

Leopold turned to the other man. "You're Fox's partner?"

"Dave Bailey's the name. I've worked for the Silver Foxes five years now. Mike was the son of the founder. He just started with us a few months ago. I phoned his uncle Ralph to tell him about it. He's coming up on the train from New York this afternoon."

Leopold thought he seemed quite calm and sure of himself under the circumstances. "Had you ever seen the killer before?"

"No, never."

"He didn't come in with coins or watches or anything earlier in the week?"

Bailey shook his head. "I'm sure I would have remembered him. Most of the people we get are older."

"All right," Leopold said. "We'll want you both to work with our artist on a composite drawing of the man. Maybe we can do it with an Identi-Kit. If not, he'll sketch something from your descriptions. Then we'll show it to the other witnesses for their reaction. And

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when Ralph Fox gets in this afternoon ask him to come see me at Headquarters."

Bailey frowned at the request. "You think he might recognize the guy?"

"Could be. Whoever it was, he was familiar enough with your operation that he didn't need to case the place first. He may have followed you here from another city."

But later that afternoon, when the composite portrait was ready, it showed only a rough-looking man with graying hair who might have been a one-time boxer. It was no one Leopold recognized immediately. He had Fletcher show Xerox copies of the picture to the other people who'd been in the room, but their opinions weren't much help.

"Seven people," Fletcher grumbled, "and they all saw something different. Two think it looks pretty much like him, but the others go off in all directions. One old guy even thinks it might have been a woman dressed like a man. Can you beat that?"

"Stranger things have happened."

"Ralph Fox is outside—the dead man's uncle. You wanted to see him."

Leopold nodded. "Get me some coffee from the machine and then show him in."

Ralph Fox was a slender man of about 60, with silvery white hair that went well with the company name. He shook hands with Leopold and then sank into the chair. "First my brother and now my nephew! It is a tragic time for our family."

"You have my deepest sympathy," Leopold said. "It was a terrible, senseless killing."

"Violent death is always senseless."

Leopold showed him a copy of the drawing. "This is a composite we made from the descriptions. Does it look like anyone you've ever seen before?"

Ralph Fox barely glanced at the picture. "No. Should it?"

"The robbery came off so well it seems he had a clear knowledge of your operation. Could he have been a disgruntled employee or ex-employee?"

"No."

"What about Mike's father? How did he die?"

"In a plane crash about a year ago. If nothing else the shock of it seemed to have straightened out Mike. He was just bumming around, getting girls in trouble, before his father died. I went to him

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and I said, Mike, we need you. We need you in the business. He came."

"Was Mike married?"

"No. At least he didn't leave a wife and children to mourn."

"You mentioned girls. If he had no wife he must have had a girl or two."

"Nobody regular. Not in a long time," Ralph Fox said. "He had really settled down to learn the business."

"I suppose his father left him a share of it."

"Yes. Young Mike would have been a full partner some day." He lowered his head as if in pain. "His killing must be avenged."

"We're working on several angles," Leopold assured him.

The silver-haired man lifted his head. "Dave says that guard could have done something to prevent the killing."

"Danny O'Bern?"

"O'Bern, yes. Dave says he never tried to draw his gun until Mike had been shot."

"The room was crowded. Innocent people would have been killed."

"Possibly this O'Bern was in league with the thief."

"All the less reason for the killer to have panicked and shot your nephew. But we're checking all possibilities. I can assure you of that."

"I hope so."

After Ralph Fox left, Leopold put in a call to Northeast Security Systems. When he'd finished talking to the office manager he decided he would have to speak with Danny O'Bern again.

Since his wife's death Danny had lived in a small apartment in a downtown urban renewal project. Originally designed for middle-income tenants, the stark concrete high-rise was gradually sinking into a less desirable image.

Leopold noticed the graffiti on the wall as he waited for the elevator, and sighed in exasperation. When O'Bern admitted him to the little two-room apartment Leopold said, "I'm surprised at the state of this building."

"It's going to the dogs, Captain. If I could afford it I'd move to a better place. I've been after the building manager to hire Northeast or some other security service."

Leopold sat down. "You've got a great view, anyway." He noticed the framed pictures of O'Bern's wife and daughter on a bookcase shelf but he didn't mention them.

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"What can I do for you, Captain? More questions about this morning?"

"More questions, Danny. My life is questions. You know the routine."

"Yeah."

"I spoke to your boss. He says you asked for the Silver Foxes job."

"Sure. I spent all last week running dull security checks on the people hired for the downtown promotion. This sounded like something halfway interesting, and the pay rate was better because I had to carry a weapon."

"Danny, Bailey thinks you could have done more than you did."

"You mean take a shot at him? And maybe kill an innocent person?"

"That's what I told him," Leopold agreed. "They just don't understand how a good cop thinks."

"Was I a good cop, Captain?"

"One of the best."

"Then you understand how it was up there today. It wasn't my fault." He walked over to the sink and took down a bottle of cheap whiskey from the cupboard. "Want a drink, Captain?"

"I'm on duty, Danny."

"Sure, I forgot."

"What about the killer? Ever see him before?"

"No."

"He seemed to know the right moves, didn't he?" Leopold speculated. "Almost as if someone tipped him off in advance."

"I've been thinking about that," O'Bern conceded, downing the shot of whiskey and following it with a sip of water. "I remember something Mike Fox told me this morning."

"What was that?"

"I went over to the bank with him while he cashed a draft. The other day he asked me where he could find some women in town and I asked him how he made out."

"And?" Leopold prompted.

"He said he was with one last night."

"A pro?"

"I don't think so. He said he preferred to pick them up in singles bars. I suggested the bar at his hotel, after work. You know, between five and six the secretaries pour in."

"I thought Bailey and Fox worked right through the dinner hour."

"Well, they did. But they took occasional breaks, you know? Fox

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went downstairs for maybe fifteen minutes. And then he left as soon as we closed up at nine o'clock."

"So you think this girl he picked up might have had a boy friend?"

"It's worth checking, Captain."

Leopold thought so too. The following morning he gave Fletcher a photograph of the dead man and asked him to check out the hotel bar and other bars in the neighborhood. "You'd better take along the composite of the killer too," he suggested.

Fletcher scowled at the picture. "What about Danny? Do you think he messed up on this one?"

"Damned if I know, Fletcher. Who's to say what goes through a man's mind at a time like that? I went over to his apartment last night. The place is getting sort of seedy and he's still drinking. He admits to needing money."

"Don't we all?"

Leopold waved him away. "Check out the picture, Fletcher. We're especially looking for a woman Fox was with the night before last."

The bartender had a good memory and Fletcher was back after lunch. "It wasn't too tough," he admitted. "She was in there last night telling everyone she'd been out on a date with the murder victim. It gives her a sort of fame, I guess."

"Doesn't sound like she's trying to hide anything. What's her name?"

"Meg Evens. She works on the switchboard at the Chamber of Commerce down the street from the hotel. The bartender says she's in there two, three times a week after work."

It was the sort of intimate interview he'd have preferred policewoman Connie Trent to conduct, but Connie was busy on another assignment. So Leopold himself went over to the Chamber building and arranged to speak with Meg Evens while another young woman filled in for her on the switchboard. She was a dark-haired woman in her mid-twenties, very open and sure of herself, and they faced each other in a little office with glass partitions that reminded Leopold of his insurance agency.

"I knew someone would come to see me sooner or later," Meg Evens told him.

"Evens? Do I have your name right?"

"Evens, like in Odds and Evens."

"I understand you were with Mike Fox the evening before his death."

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"Sure, only I didn't know who he was then. I met him at the hotel bar and he bought me a few drinks. Said his name was Mike and he was in town this week on business."

"What time were you with him?"

She thought about that, brushing the dark hair back from her face. "Gee, it must have been after nine. I saw him there earlier for a few minutes, but then I went out to eat with a girl friend."

"Had he arranged to meet you later?"

"Oh, he made some kidding remark about going off duty at nine, but I didn't pay much attention."

"You went back there, though."

"Yeah, sure. Tuesday is a dull night for me. There's not even anything I like on TV."

"How late did you stay with him?"

"Till around one o'clock, I guess."

"You were at the hotel bar all that time?"

"Well, after a while we went up to his room and had a couple drinks there."

"I see. Was his partner there too?"

She bristled a bit at that. "No, there was just Mike and me. What do you take me for, anyway?"

"Sorry. I'm conducting a murder investigation and I have to get the facts. This room of Mike's was on the tenth floor?"

"Tenth floor? No—it was on the eighth. I think the number was 808."

"But you're sure it was the same man?" He brought out the picture from his pocket. "This man?"

"Is that how he looked dead? The picture in the paper looked more like him. But sure, it was him. No doubt about it."

Leopold showed her the other picture—the composite drawing of the killer. "How about this man? Ever see him around the bar? Or anywhere else?"

"I don't think so, no." She hesitated. "But you know, there's something about him that seems familiar."

"It might not be too accurate, though some witnesses called it a good likeness."

"I don't know what it is. Maybe he reminds me of someone who comes in here."

"In the Chamber?"

"Or someone I see occasionally. A delivery man of some sort. I just don't know."

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"Give it some thought," Leopold urged her. "I'll leave a copy of the picture with you . . . "

The manager of the Riverside Plaza Hotel needed only a few minutes to verify the news that Leopold brought him. On Monday, the morning after checking in, Mike Fox had rented a separate single room on the eighth floor. He'd told the desk clerk his partner sometimes snored and he liked to get away from him to a private room. The eighth-floor room was to be charged to him personally rather than the Silver Foxes Company.

"Is there someone else occupying the room now?" Leopold asked.

"Well, no." The hotel manager scratched his bald scalp. "Matter of fact, we dropped the ball on this. The room was rented for five nights—till Saturday—and it didn't occur to anyone after the killing to cancel it. He was officially registered on the tenth floor, after all."

"You mean some of his things might still be there?"

"I suppose they could be."

"Let's go take a look."

Room 808 was unoccupied and undisturbed. The bed was made up and seemed not to have been used since Tuesday night. Leopold found a safety razor and toothbrush in the bathroom, and some fresh underwear in a drawer. In another drawer was an unopened pint of Scotch. It seemed likely that Mike Fox had used the second room for entertaining young women, and Leopold wondered if he did that sort of thing in other cities as well.

He thanked the manager and went up to the tenth floor. The door of the Foxes suite was standing open and he could see Dave Bailey packing a suitcase inside. "Checking out?" he asked.

Bailey nodded. "Ralph Fox canceled the rest of the week. He says we can come back here after the first of the year. He doesn't think it's safe till you catch up with that guy."

"I doubt if he'd come back for a second try."

"Don't be too sure."

Leopold sat down on the edge of the empty bed. He assumed it was the one Mike Fox had used when he wasn't in his other room. "You didn't tell me Mike slept downstairs," he said.

"Downstairs? Oh, he did that sometimes in other cities too. A great man with the ladies, wherever we went. I didn't think anything about it any more."

"Did his uncle know?"

"I doubt it. He paid for the room out of his own money. Sometimes

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he'd sleep in our room if he didn't connect with anyone. But if he did have a girl he couldn't very well bring her up here with me, and there's no bed in the adjoining room, just the desks."

"Did he always take a second room?"

"Not always. Most of the time in larger cities. Hell, the guy was single—you know? What's any of this got to do with his murder?"

"By all accounts the bandit went out of his way to kill Mike, for no good reason we can uncover. Maybe there was a good reason. Maybe Mike had picked up the gunman's girl the night before in a bar."

"Did you talk to the girl he was with?"

"Yes," Leopold said. "She didn't recognize the composite sketch, or at least she said she didn't."

"I think you're barking up the wrong tree, Captain. I still say you should check out that security guard, O'Bern. He and the killer are probably splitting the take right now."

"We'll keep an eye on him," Leopold promised. "You heading home now?"

"Back to New York for Mike's funeral. Then they'll team me up with a new partner."

"How'd you like working with the boss's nephew?"

"Mike was okay."

"He inherited his father's share of the company, didn't he?"

"Sure. He was in training to take it over."

"Sounds as if his mind wasn't entirely on business, though."

"Like I said, Mike was okay." He finished packing and snapped the locks shut on his suitcase.

"All right," Leopold said with a sigh. He was reluctant to let the man go, to see yet another link to the dead man fade away. But there was no reason to hold him any longer. Leopold had run out of questions.

Fletcher was back at Headquarters, looking unhappy. "Nobody knows our killer, Captain. Either that composite is way off the mark or he's from out of town."

"He could be an outsider. The Silver Foxes flew in from Minneapolis on Sunday. Send a picture off to the Minneapolis police and see if anyone out there recognizes him."

"Good idea," Fletcher admitted.

"What about Danny O'Bern? What's he up to?"

"We don't have a man on him. Should we?"

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"No, I suppose not. I just don't see Danny setting this thing up. He's not that desperate for money."

"You think the killer's a loner, then."

"I don't know what to think, Fletcher. Yes, I think he's a loner, but that doesn't explain why he shot Mike Fox when he already had the money. It's the sort of thing a nervous gunman might have done, but this fellow didn't act nervous, by all accounts."

Fletcher went off to send the photo to the Minneapolis police, and Leopold was about to follow him out of the office when the phone rang. It was Meg Evens.

"I've been thinking about that picture you showed me," she said. "I know this sounds crazy but it reminds me of the masked man in front of the hotel."

"The mas—"

"You know—for the downtown promotion."

Leopold grabbed a pencil. "The Chamber of Commerce organized that promotion, didn't they?"

"Yes, along with the Retail Merchants' Council."

"Then you must have the name of this fellow."

"Just a minute. I'll see." She returned after a moment and said, "I think his name is Felix Glate. We hired them all through the state unemployment agency."

"Thanks, Meg. We'll check it out."

He hung up and buzzed for Fletcher. "What is it, Captain?"

"Ever hear of a criminal *removing* his mask to commit a robbery?"

"Huh?"

"Check our records for a Felix Glate. Then meet me downstairs in fifteen minutes with the car."

When Fletcher appeared with the car he had the information. "The computer printout lists a Felix Armand Glate with an arrest for armed robbery last year. It was dismissed for lack of evidence."

"Do you have a mug shot?"

"Here."

Leopold studied the face, then held it up next to the photo copy of the composite drawing. "It could be the same man. The mouth looks a little like him."

"Where is he now?"

"Probably standing in front of the hotel with his mask on. Let's go see."

They parked in the delivery area at the back of the hotel and walked around to the front. The masked and caped man was at his

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post, handing out discount coupons good at various downtown stores. He glanced at them as Leopold and Fletcher approached. "Shop downtown for storybook values!" he announced, holding out some coupons.

"Are you Felix Glate?" Leopold asked.

"What about it?" His voice dropped and the eyes shifted behind the mask.

"Police. We want to question you about the robbery and kill—"

Glate hit Leopold in the chest with both hands, pushing him off balance. Then he was running toward the bridge across the river. "Stop!" Fletcher yelled. "We're police!" He took off after the running man, drawing his revolver as he ran. "Stop or I'll shoot!"

"We want him alive!" Leopold called out as he joined in the chase. He must be getting old, he decided, to let Glate push him aside like that.

The man kept running, his long black cape flowing out behind him. A woman was knocked from his path, and pedestrians scrambled for safety. "Stop or I'll shoot!" Fletcher shouted again, and fired once in the air.

Glate paused at the far end of the bridge and whirled around. For an instant Leopold thought he was surrendering, but then the cape fell away and Leopold saw the gun. "Fletcher!" he shouted.

There were three shots, fired almost simultaneously, and somewhere a woman screamed in terror. Fletcher and Leopold reached the caped figure together. "I'm sorry, Captain," Fletcher muttered. "I didn't have any choice."

"I know."

Felix Glate died an hour later without making a statement. But they didn't really need one. Within a few hours ballistics tests established that Glate's gun had been the murder weapon, and Danny O'Bern identified the body as that of the Silver Fox killer. Just before six o'clock Fletcher came in with the last piece of evidence.

"We searched Glate's apartment," he announced, dropping a plastic-wrapped packet on Leopold's desk. "The stolen money was all there, hidden in the toilet tank."

"So he was in it alone. He didn't have to split with anyone."

"He didn't have to split with anyone," Fletcher said carefully, "but that doesn't mean he was in it alone."

Leopold saw he was holding a small photograph in a plastic evidence envelope. "What do you mean? What've you got there?"

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"The picture was in the packet with the money."

Leopold took it and stared hard at it. It was a picture of a young man and woman at the beach, standing with their arms around one another. The man was Mike Fox—a bit younger, and with a thinner mustache, but unmistakably Mike Fox. Leopold didn't know the girl, though the tilt of her head seemed to stir a memory. "What do you think?" he asked Fletcher.

"How does this sound, Captain? Mike Fox was Glate's partner. Fox planned the whole thing and coached Glate about the best time for the robbery. Glate pulled the job on schedule, but as he was backing out of the room he decided he'd be foolish to split with Fox, so he killed him. Simple, eh?"

"What did he have the picture for?"

"Huh? Hell, I don't know."

"Do you keep pictures of male friends hidden away?"

"No," Fletcher admitted. "Nor females either. But maybe Glate was gay."

"Then he'd hardly treasure a photograph of Mike Fox with his arms around a woman. No, Fletcher, you're neglecting the most obvious explanation. Glate had the picture of Mike Fox hidden away so he could study it—so he'd be able to identify Fox when the time came to kill him."

"What—?"

"Don't you see? Glate was a hired killer. The robbery was secondary. He went into that hotel room to murder Mike Fox."

Fletcher sat down. "Then we're right back where we started from. Worse, in fact, because now Glate is dead and can't talk."

"Don't blame yourself for killing him, Fletcher. You nearly stopped a bullet yourself."

"Do you think Dave Bailey hired Glate? Maybe he resented Fox being brought into the business."

Leopold shook his head. "No, not Bailey. If Bailey had put Glate up to it, he wouldn't have needed to supply a picture of Fox. There were just the two of them, and O'Bern in his uniform. He simply could have told Glate to shoot the man at the other desk."

"How about the uncle? With Mike Fox dead does he inherit the whole business?"

Leopold didn't answer. He was staring at the photo of Fox and the girl. He'd just remembered where he had seen her before.

Danny O'Bern opened the door and stepped aside as Leopold en-

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tered. "That was good work today, Captain. I went down and identified the body."

"Funny case. Like I told Fletcher, we had a robber who took off his mask instead of putting one on."

"Did Bailey see the body too?"

"He's gone back to New York. There's probably no need to bring him up here again. The money's been recovered."

"How'd you spot that guy Glate?"

"A young woman from the Chamber of Commerce recognized him from the composite sketch. Probably wouldn't happen again in twenty years."

O'Bern walked to the table and picked up a glass. Leopold could tell it wasn't his first drink of the day. "Well now, what do you need me for?"

Leopold took the photo from his pocket. "We found this in Glate's apartment, Danny, hidden away with the money."

"So?"

"That girl with her arm around Mike Fox is your daughter, Danny. I remembered seeing her picture over there in the bookcase when I was here before. Damn it, Danny, you were behind it all, weren't you? You put Felix Glate up to it."

The glass was shaking in Danny O'Bern's hand. "Why would you say that?"

"You asked your boss for the Silver Foxes job. When you heard they were coming to town you decided to revenge yourself on Mike Fox for driving your daughter to suicide. He did, didn't he—at least in your mind."

"Oh, he did it, all right." The tired eyes held Leopold's for an instant. The time for deception was over. "You've never had children. You don't know what it's like to lose one, especially like that! A suicide at twenty-two! He made her do terrible things, and she did them because she thought he loved her. She even sent me this picture of them together. When she found out she was one of many, and not even a very important one to Mike Fox, she killed herself." He set his empty glass on the table. "I wanted to kill him with my bare hands, but I was afraid I'd lose my nerve at the last minute. So I got Felix Glate to do it for me."

"How'd you know Glate?"

"I arrested him once. I came across him last week doing security checks on the people hired for the downtown promotion. Hell, you didn't need a spotless record to pass out coupons, but finding Glate

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the week before the Silver Foxes came to town was like an answer to my prayers. I arranged to draw the security duty and gave Glate the picture. Later I pointed out Fox when we went to the bank together."

"And you promised Glate not to interfere with his robbery."

"Yeah. It was a simple job for him, and he didn't mind killing somebody in the bargain. I said he could keep the whole twenty grand if he just killed Mike Fox for me." He put a hand over his face. "God, that man was still doing it—still picking up girls every night! He even asked me where to look!"

"Didn't he recognize your name?"

Danny shook his head. "My daughter was using a stage name to start her career. He never knew her as O'Bern."

Leopold said, "I'm going to have to take you in, Danny."

"How'd you know? Was it just the picture?"

"Mainly that. But I remembered one other thing. You and Bailey said you'd never seen the gunman before. But if you ran security checks on the people hired for the downtown promotion you must have seen him as recently as last week. You couldn't have failed to recognize him in the hotel room."

"All right," Danny O'Bern said with a sigh. "Let me get my coat."

With any other arrest Leopold would have read the suspect his rights. With any other arrest Leopold would have gone into the bedroom with the suspect while he got his coat. But Danny O'Bern was an ex-cop, and Leopold let him go in alone.

Then he heard the shot, and he knew the one thing Danny had been brave enough—or foolish enough—to do himself.

"Q"

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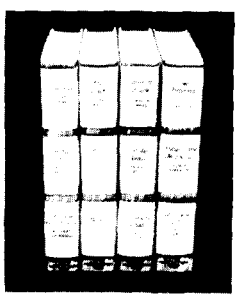

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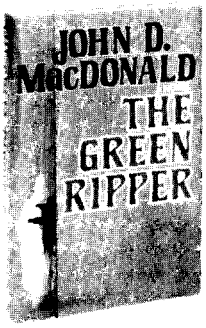

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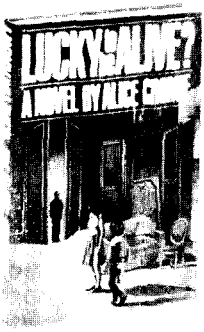

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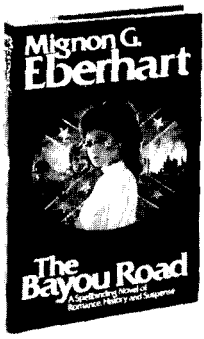

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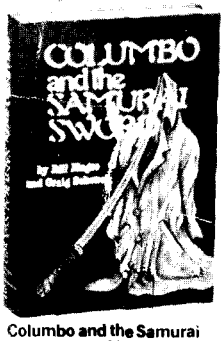

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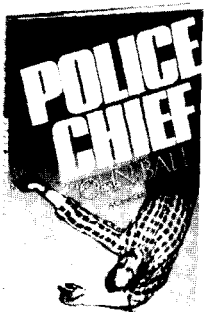

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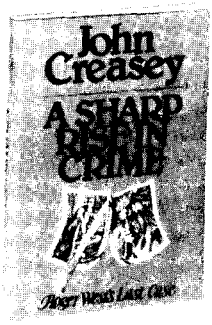

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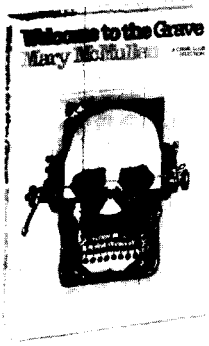

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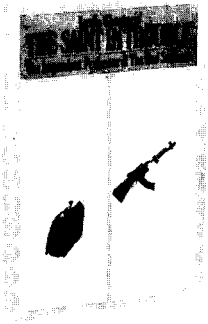

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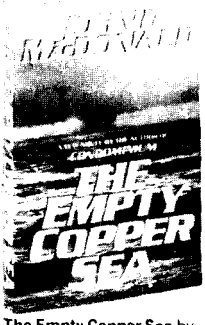

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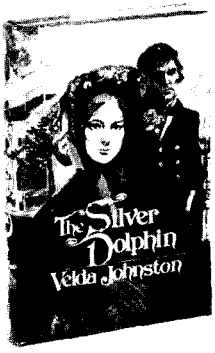

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